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Front cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones, illustrating a scene from "You're All Alone."

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

THERE HAS been a lot of fuss and bother about "flying saucers" again during the past month or so. The newspapers seem to stir up the fuss, and it all seems to bother the Combined Armed Forces. There were varied and scattered accounts throughout the country by eye-witnesses relating the appearance of the "mysterious" objects over various towns and countrysides.

THEN ALONG came a national magazine, *True*, in which a Commander in the United States Navy recounted instances where on official duty he had seen the much discussed disks. His conclusions, backed by a wealth of technical data as a Naval officer, were that the *flying saucers* were real—and not a product of government experimental design.

THIS ACCOUNT was followed up in another national magazine, *U.S. News & World Report*, with the astounding revelation that the flying saucers were—and have been since 1942—experimental naval craft. The article went on to give quite exacting details as to design, what type of motors they are powered with (jet engines), and the rate of speed they are capable of attaining (200 to 600 m.p.h. cruising speed). There were photographs of various models being considered by the Navy, and the final recap stating that the saucers could no longer be considered a mystery since the Navy admitted "flying" them periodically over the country.

FOLLOWING close on the heels of this report—by a matter of days—came a new release. This time in the newspapers under the banner of an AP dispatch: "Radio Commentator Henry J. Taylor said tonight. (April 3) many 'flying saucers' really are United States controlled experimental jet fighter planes." Mr. Taylor identified them as being the XF5U. He commented: "It is a jet plane of incredible speed. It really looks like, and is shaped like a pancake."

DIRECTLY beneath this release was a later AP dispatch from Washington: "The navy said tonight the nearest thing to a 'flying saucer' it has ever developed has not flown since 1947. It said that a 3000 pound pancake shaped plane was flown several times. A full scale experimental model never got off the ground and was scrapped in January, 1949, the navy said."

WHICH BRINGS us up to date—and a question. Gentlemen, who's fooling whom? There just can't be that much disunity within the Navy High Command to allow so many conflicting reports to be circulated in national publications. One would be led to assume that the higher echelon is becoming pigeon-toed trying to walk in several different directions at the same time. But even granting that the navy has been experimenting with such aircraft, the very interesting point to note in the AP releases is that, in the case of the first mentioned the statement was: "—Henry J. Taylor said tonight many 'flying saucers' really are United States controlled experimental jet fighter planes." And in the second release quoting the navy: "The navy said tonight the nearest thing to a flying saucer it has ever developed—" Those two statements are identical in one particular: in the former it is stated that "many" are official projects. It does not state "all". In the latter it is stated that the "nearest" thing to a flying saucer, etc.

CAN WE ASSUME therefore that all of the frantic communiques are a flustered effort to cover up the embarrassment of official branches of the Service? We believe so.

JUST WHAT, then, does it all add up to? As we see it, all this data being fed the American public is a lot of hogwash. Our technology just hasn't got the knowhow to produce a craft of the speed and design the "flying saucers" are reputed to have. From all available sources the speeds attained are, to our technical achievement, astronomical by comparison. A flying saucer would "crawl" at 600 m.p.h. And as to jet power, there has been no known evidence from eye-witnesses to the effect that a vapor trail was in evidence in the wake of a flying saucer. No vapor, no jets, unless at very low altitudes. A great many disks have been seen at high altitudes, where a vapor trail would have been distinguishable.

ALL OF WHICH leads up to...? We're sticking our necks out. We say the disks are ships from another world. We don't know what world, or their purpose. But we believe that's what they are. So how about it, GHQ, let's stop fumbling the ball. Either give us proof or admit the obvious ..... WLH

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YOU'RE ALL ALONE

By Fritz Leiber

Do you think that you're the master of your own destiny? If so, live on in your fool's paradise—you're safer that way . . .

Life went on in the great city below, life that was unaware of the towering figure above . . .

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JUST BEFORE Carr Mackay caught sight of the frightened girl, the world went dead on him. You've all had the experience. Suddenly the life drains out of everything. Familiar faces become pink patterns. Commonplace objects look weird. All sounds are loud and unnatural. Of course it lasts only a few moments, but it can be pretty disturbing.

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It was pretty disturbing to Carr. Outwardly nothing in the big employment office had changed. The other interviewers were mostly busy with their share of the job-hunters who trickled into the Loop, converged on General Employment, and then went their ways again. There was the usual rat-ta-tat-tat of typing, the click of slides from the curtained cubicle where someone was getting an eye-test, and in the background Chicago's unceasing mutter, rising and falling with the passing el trains.

But to Carr Mackay it was all meaningless. The job-hunters seemed like ants trailing into and out of a hole. Big Tom Elvested at the next desk nodded at him, but that didn't break the spell. It was as if an invisible hand had been laid on his shoulder and a cold voice had said, "You think it all adds up to something, brother. It doesn't."

It was then that the frightened girl came into the waiting room and sat down in one of the high-backed wooden benches. Carr watched her through the huge glass panel that made everything in the waiting-room silent and slightly unreal. Just a slim girl in a cardigan. College type, with dark hair falling untidily to her shoulders. And nervous—in fact, frightened. Still, just another girl. Nothing tremendously striking about her.

And yet. . . the life flooded back into Carr's world as he watched her.

Suddenly she sat very still, looking straight ahead. Another woman had come into the waiting room. A big blonde, handsome in a posterish way, with a stunningly perfect hair-do. Yet her tailored suit gave her a mannish look and there was something queer about her eyes. She stood looking around. She saw the frightened girl. She started toward her.

The phone on Carr's desk buzzed.

As he picked it up, he noticed that the big blonde had stopped in front of the frightened girl and was looking down at her. The frightened girl seemed to be trying to ignore her.

"That you, Carr?" came over the phone.

He felt a rush of pleasure. "Hello, Marcia dear," he said quickly.

The voice over the phone sank to an exciting whisper. "Forgotten our date tonight?"

"Of course not, dear," Carr assured her.

There was a faint laugh and then the phone voice purred, "That's right, darling. If anybody starts forgetting dates, it will be me. I like to agonize my men."

Carr felt his heart go from happy to uneasy. As he tried to figure out how to take Marcia's spur-scratch lightly, his gaze went back to the little drama beyond the glass wall. The big blonde had sat down beside the frightened girl and seemed to be stroking her hand. The frightened girl was still staring straight ahead—desperately, Carr thought.

"Did I hurt your feelings, Carr?" the phone voice inquired innocently.

"Of course not, dear."

"Because there aren't any other men—now—and I'm looking forward to tonight as something very special."

"I'll pick you up at seven," he said.

"That's right. Remember to look nice."

"I will." Then he asked in a lower voice, "Look, do you really mean it about tonight being something very special."

But his question was cut off by a "'By now, darling," and a click. Carr prepared to feel agonized as well as bored by the tail end of the afternoon —(If only Marcia weren't so beautiful, or so tormenting!)—when a flurry of footsteps made him look up.

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The frightened girl was approaching his desk.

The big blonde had followed her as far as the door in the glass wall and was watching her from it.

THE FRIGHTENED girl sat down in the applicant's chair, but she didn't look him in the eye. She nervously gathered her wool jacket at the throat.

He twitched her a smile. "I don't believe I have your application folder yet, Miss . . . ?"

The frightened girl did not answer.

To put her at ease, Carr rattled on, "Not that it matters. We can talk over things while we wait for the clerk to bring it."

Still she didn't look at him.

"I suppose you did fill out a folder and that you were sent to me?"

Then he saw that she was trembling and once again the life seemed to drain out of everything—except her. It was as if the whole office—Chicago—the world—had become mere background for a chalk-faced girl in a sloppy cardigan, arms huddled tight around her, hands gripping her thin elbows, staring at him horrorstruck.

For some incredible reason, she seemed to be frightened of *him*.

She shrank down in the chair, her white-circled eyes fixed on his. As they followed her movements, another shudder went through her. The tip of her tongue licked her upper lip. Then she said in a small, terrified voice, "All right, you've got me. But don't draw it out. Don't play with me. Get it over with."

Carr checked the impulse to grimace incredulously. He chuckled and said, "I know how you feel. Coming into a big employment office does seem an awful plunge. But we won't chain you to a rivet gun," he went on, with a wild attempt at humor, "or sell you to the white slavers. It's still a free country. You can do as you please."

She did not react. He looked away uneasily. The big blonde was still watching from the doorway, her manner implying that she owned the place. Her eyes looked whiter than they should be and they didn't seem quite to focus.

He looked back at the frightened girl. Her hands still gripped her elbows, but she was leaning forward now and studying his face, as if everything in the world depended on what she saw there.

"You're not one of them?" she asked.

He frowned puzzledly. "Them? Who?"

"You're not?" she repeated, still watching his eyes.

"I don't understand," he said.

"Don't you know what you are?" she asked with sudden fierceness. "Don't you know whether you're one of them or not?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," he assured her, "and I haven't the faintest idea of whom you mean by 'them.' "

Slowly her hands loosened their hold on her elbows and trailed into her lap. "No," she said, "I guess you're not. You haven't their filthy look."

"You'd better explain things from the beginning," Carr told her.

"Please, not now," she begged.

"Who's that woman following you?" he pressed. "Is she one of 'them?' "

The terror returned to her face. "I can't tell you that. Please don't ask me. And please don't look at her. It's terribly important that she doesn't think I've seen her."

"But how could she possibly think otherwise after the way she planked herself down beside you?"

"Please, oh please." She was almost

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whimpering. "I can't tell you why. It's just terribly important that we act naturally, that we seem to be doing whatever we're supposed to be doing. Can we?"

Carr studied her. She was obviously close to hysteria. "Sure," he said. He leaned back in his chair, smiled at her, and raised his voice a trifle. "Just what sort of a job do you feel would make the best use of your abilities, Miss...?"

"Job? Oh yes, that's why I'd have come here, isn't it?" For a moment she stared at him helplessly. Then, the words tumbling over each other, she began to talk. "Let's see, I can play the piano. Not very well. Mostly classical. I've studied it a lot, though. I once wanted to be a concert pianist. And I've done some amateur acting. And I used to play a mediocre game of tennis—" Her grotesquely animated expression froze. "But that isn't the sort of thing you want to know, is it?"

CARR shrugged. "Helps give me a picture. Did some amateur acting myself once, in college." He kept his voice casual. "Have you had any regular jobs?"

"Once I worked for a little while in an architect's office."

"Did you learn to read blueprints?" he asked.

"Blueprints?" The girl shivered. "Not much, I'm afraid. I hate patterns. Patterns are traps. If you live according to a pattern, other people know how to get control of you." She leaned forward confidingly, her fingers touching the edge of the desk. "Oh, and I'm a good judge of people. I have to be. I suppose you have to be too." She looked at him strangely. "Don't you really know what you are?" she asked softly. "Haven't you found out yet? Why, you must be almost forty. Surely in that time... Oh, you must know."

"I still haven't the ghost of an idea what you're talking about," Carr said. "What am I?"

The girl hesitated.

"Tell me," he said.

She shook her head. "If you honestly don't know, I don't think I should tell you. As long as you don't know, you're relatively safe."

"From what? Please stop being mysterious," Carr said. "Just what is it about me that's so important?"

"But if I don't tell you," she went on, disregarding his question, "then I'm letting you run a blind risk. Not a big one, but very horrible. And with them so close and perhaps suspecting ...Oh, it's hard to decide."

A clerk dropped an application folder in the wire basket on Carr's desk. He looked at it. It wasn't for a girl at all. It started, "Jimmie Kozacs. Male. Age 43."

He realized that the frightened girl was studying his face again.

"Maybe you weren't what I think you are, until today," she was saying, more to herself than him. "Maybe my bursting in here was what did it. Maybe I was the one who awakened you." She clenched her hands, torturing the palms with the long, untapering fingers. "To think that I would ever do that to anyone! To think that I would ever cause anyone the agony that *he* caused me!"

The bleak misery in her voice caught at Carr. "What *is* the matter?" He pleaded. "Now we've got a 'he' as well as a 'they.' And what is this business about 'awakening?' Please tell me everything."

The girl looked shocked. "Now?" Her glance half-circled the room, strayed toward the glass wall. "No, not here. I can't." Her right hand suddenly dived into the pocket of her car-

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digan and came out with a stubby, chewed pencil. She ripped a sheet from Carr's scratch pad and began to scribble hurriedly.

Carr started to lean forward, but just then a big area of serge suit swam into view. Big Tom Elvested had ambled over from the next desk. The girl gave him an odd look, then went on scribbling. Tom ignored her.

"Say, Carr," he boomed amiably, "remember the girl Midge and I wanted you to go on a double date with? I've told you about her—Jane Gregg. Well, she's going to be dropping in here a little later and I want you to meet her. Midge had an idea the four of us might be able to go out together tonight."

"Sorry, I've got a date," Carr told him sharply. It annoyed Carr that Tom should discuss private matters so loudly in front of an applicant.

"Okay, okay," Tom retorted a bit huffily. "I'm not asking you to do social service work. This girl's darn good-looking."

"That's swell," Carr told him.

TOM LOOKED at him skeptically. "Anyway," he warned, "I'll be bringing her over when she comes in." And he faded back toward his desk. As he did so, the frightened girl shot him an even odder look, but her pencil kept on scribbling. The scratch of it seemed to Carr the only real sound in the whole office. He glanced guardedly down the aisle. The big blonde with the queer eyes was still at the door, but she had moved ungraciously aside to make way for a dumpy man in blue jeans, who was looking around uncertainly.

The dumpy man veered toward one of the typists. Her head bobbed up and she said something to him. He gave her an "I gotcha, pal" nod and headed for Carr's desk.

The frightened girl noticed him coming, shoved aside paper and pencil in a flurry of haste, and stood up.

"Sit down," Carr said. "That fellow can wait. Incidently, do you know Tom Elvested?"

She disregarded the question and quickly moved into the aisle.

Carr followed her. "I really want to talk with you," he said.

"No," she breathed, edging away from him.

"But we haven't got anywhere yet," he objected.

Suddenly she smiled like a toothpaste ad. "Thank you for being so helpful," she said in a loud voice. "I'll think over what you've told me, though I don't think the job is one which would appeal to me." She poked out her hand. Automatically Carr took it. It was icy.

"Don't follow me," she whispered. "And if you care the least bit for me or my safety, don't do anything, whatever happens."

"But I don't even know your name..." His voice trailed off. She was striding rapidly down the aisle. The big blonde was standing squarely in her path. The girl did not swerve an inch. Then, just as they were about to collide, the big blonde lifted her hand and gave the girl a stinging slap across the cheek.

Carr started, winced, took a forward step, froze.

The big blonde stepped aside, smiling sardonically.

The girl rocked, wavered for a step or two, then walked on without turning her head.

No one said anything, no one did anything, no one even looked up, at least not obviously, though everyone in the office must have heard the slap if they hadn't seen it. But with the universal middle-class reluctance, Carr thought, to recognize that nasty things

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happened in the world, they pretended not to notice.

The big blonde flicked into place a shellacked curl, glancing around her as if at so much dirt. Leisurely she turned and stalked out.

CHAPTER II

The most terrible secret in the world? Here's a hint. Think about the people closest to you. What do you know about what's really going on inside their heads? Nothing, brother, nothing at all...

CARR walked back to his desk. His face felt hot, his mind turbulent, the office sinister. The dumpy man in blue jeans had already taken the girl's place, but Carr ignored him. He didn't sit down. The scrap of paper on which the girl had scribbled caught his eye. He picked it up.

> Watch out for the wall-eyed blonde, the young man without a hand, and the affable-seeming older man. But the small dark man with glasses may be your friend.

Carr frowned grotesquely. "...wall-eyed blonde..." —that must be the woman who had watched. But as for the other three— "...small dark man with glasses may be your friend..." —why, it sounded like a charade.

"Carr, if you can spare a moment..." Carr recognized Tom Elvested's voice but for the moment he ignored it. He started to turn over the paper to see if the frightened girl had scribbled anything on the other side, when—

"...I would like to introduce Jane Gregg," Tom finished.

Carr looked around at Tom—and forgot everything else.

Big Tom Elvested was smiling fatuously. "Jane," he said, "this is Carr Mackay. Carr, this is Jane." And he moved his hand in the gesture of one who gives a friendly squeeze to the elbow of the person standing beside him.

Only there was no person standing beside him.

Where Tom's gesture had indicated Jane Gregg should be standing, there was only empty air.

Tom's smiling face went from empty air to Carr and back again. He said, "I've been wanting to get you two together for a long time."

Carr almost laughed, there was something so droll about the realism of Tom's actions. He remembered the pantomimes in the acting class at college, when you pretended to eat a dinner or drive an automobile, without any props, just going through the motions. In that class Tom Elvested would have rated an A-plus.

Tom nodded his head and coyly asked the empty air, "And does he seem as interesting, now that you've actually met him?"

Suddenly Carr didn't want to laugh at all. If there was anything big Tom Elvested ordinarily wasn't, it was an actor.

"She's a cute little trick, isn't she, Carr?" Tom continued, giving the air another playful pat.

Carr moved forward, incidently running a hand through the air, which was quite as empty as it looked. "Cut the kidding, Tom," he said.

Tom merely rocked on his heels, like an elephant being silly. Once again his hand moved out, this time to flick the air at a point a foot higher. "And such lovely hair. I always go for the page boy style myself."

"Cut it out, Tom, please," Carr said seriously.

"Of course, maybe she's a little young for you," Tom babbled on.

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"Cut it out!" Carr snapped. His face was hardly a foot from Tom's, but Tom didn't seem to see him at all. Instead he kept looking through Carr toward where Carr had been standing before. And he kept on playfully patting the air.

"Oh yes," he assured the air with a smirk, "Carr's quite a wolf. That's the reason he had those few gray hairs. They're a wolf insignia. You'll have to watch your step with him."

"Cut it out!" Carr repeated angrily and grabbed Tom firmly by the shoulders.

What happened made Carr wish he hadn't. Tom Elvested's face grew strained and red, like an enraged baby's. An intense throbbing was transmitted to Carr's hands. And from Tom's lips came a mounting, meaningless mutter, like a sound tape running backwards.

CARR JERKED away. He felt craven and weak, as helpless as a child. He edged off until there were three desks between himself and Tom, and he was standing behind Ernie Acosta, who was busy with a client.

He could hardly bring his voice to a whisper.

"Ernie, something's happened to Tom. I want you to help me."

Ernie didn't look up.

"Ernie," he repeated, louder, "I need your help."

Ernie continued to talk to his client.

Across the room Carr saw a gray-mustached man walking briskly. He hurried over to him, glancing back apprehensively at Tom, who was still standing there red-faced and softly babbling.

"Dr. Wexler," he blurted, "I'm afraid Tom Elvested's had some sort of attack. Would you—?"

But Dr. Wexler walked on without slackening his pace and disappeared through the black curtains of the eye-testing cubicle.

At that instant, as Carr watched the black curtains swing together, a sudden spasm of extreme terror seized him. As if something huge and hostile were poised behind him, he dared not make a move.

His feelings were like those of a man in a waxworks museum, who speaks to a guide only to find that he has addressed one of the wax figures.

His paralyzed thoughts, suddenly working like lightning, snatched at that idea.

What if the whole world were like a waxworks museum? In motion, of course, like clockworks, but utterly mindless, purposeless, mechanical.

What if a wax figure named Jane Gregg had come alive and moved from her place—or merely been removed, unalive, as a toy is lifted out of a shop window? What if the whole show was going on without her, because the whole show was just a machine and didn't know or care whether a figure named Jane Gregg was there or not?

That would explain Tom Elvested going through the motions of an introduction—one mechanical figure carrying on just as well without its partner.

What if the frightened girl had been a mechanical figure come alive and out of her place in the machine—and desperately trying to pretend that she *was* in her place, because something suspected her? That would fit with the things she'd said.

What if he, Carr Mackay, a mechanical figure like the others, had come alive and stepped out of his place? That would explain why Ernie and Dr. Wexler had disregarded him.

What if it really were true? The whole universe a mindless machine. People just mindless parts of that machine. Only a very few of them really

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conscious, really alive.

What if the ends of the earth were nearer to you than the mind you thought lay behind the face you spoke to?

What if the things people said, the things that seemed to mean so much to you, were something recorded on a kind of phonograph disk a million million years ago?

What if you were all alone?

Very, very slowly (Carr felt that if he made a quick move, the huge and hostile something poised behind him would grab) he looked around the office. Everything was proceeding normally: murmur-murmur, rat-a-tat-tat, click-click, (and outside rumble-rumble.)

Just like a machine.

WHAT DID you do if you found that the whole world was a machine, and that you were out of your proper place in it?"

There was only one thing to do.

Still very, very slowly, Carr edged back to his desk. Tom Elvested had gone back to his own desk and sat down, was leafing through some record cards. He did not look up.

The dumpy man in blue jeans was still sitting in front of Carr's desk. He was talking at Carr's empty chair.

"So you really figure you can get me a job in magnetic at Norcross Aircraft?" he was saying. "That'll be swell."

The mechanical interview had been going on just as well without the interviewer.

Carr cringed down into his chair. With shaking fingers he picked up the last application folder and read again, "Jimmie Kozacs. Age 43." The dumpy man looked about that age. Then, further down, "Magnetic Inspector."

The dumpy man stood up and plucked something invisible from the air, squinted at it, and remarked, "So all I got to do is show them this at the gate?"

"Yes, Mr. Kozacs," Carr heard himself whisper in a cracked voice.

"Swell," said the dumpy man. "Thanks a lot, er. . ." (He glanced at the nameplate on Carr's desk) ". . .Mr. Mackay. Aw, don't get up. Well, thanks a lot."

The dumpy man thrust out his hand. With a great effort, Carr thrust his own hand into it. He felt his fingers clamped and pumped up and down, as if by rubber-padded machinery.

"Good luck, Mr. Kozacs," he croaked.

The dumpy man nodded and walked off.

Yes, there was only one thing to do.

A creature with a toothbrush mustache and a salesman's smile and eczema scars half-hidden by powder was approaching the chair the dumpy man had vacated. Carr snatched up the next folder—there were two or three in the wire basket now—and braced himself.

. . .one thing. You could go to your place in the machine and pretend to be part of it, so that the huge and hostile something wouldn't notice you were alive.

The creature with the toothbrush mustache seated itself without asking.

"Mr. Weston, I believe," Carr quavered, consulting the folder.

"That's right," the creature replied.

From the next desk Tom Elvested gave Carr a big mechanical grin and a meaningless wink, just like a ventriloquist's giant dummy.

CHAPTER III

Sure, that's the secret — the world's just a big engine. All matter, no mind. You doubt it? Look

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at a big-city crowd. They don't see you, brother. They don't see anything. They're just parts of a big engine....

BY THE time five-fifteen came and Carr hurried down the brass-edged steps, taking them three at a time, and darted across the lobby and pushed through the squirrel cage of the revolving door, he had mastered his terror —or at least made a good start toward rationalizing his one big fear.

Perhaps he had just happened to meet a half dozen psychotics in one day—after all, employment offices have more of a lunatic fringe than most businesses.

Perhaps he had suffered some peculiar hallucinations, including the illusion that he'd been talking loudly when he'd just been whispering.

Perhaps most of it had been an elaborate practical joke—Tom and Ernie were both great kidders.

But when he stepped out of the revolving door into a pandemonium of honking, clanking, whistling, shouting —faces that leaped, elbows that jostled, lights that glared—he found that all his rationalizations rang hollow. There was something terribly like a machine in the swift pound of Chicago's rush-hour rhythm, he thought as he plunged into it.

Perhaps thinking of people solely as clients of General Employment was what was wrong with him, he tried to persuade himself with grim humor. For so long he had been thinking of people as mere human raw material, as window dummies to be put on display or routed back to the storeroom, that now they were having their revenge on him, by acting as if he didn't exist.

He reached Michigan Boulevard. The wall of empty space on the other side, fronting the wall of buildings on this, hinted at the lake beyond. The Art Institute traced a classic pattern against the gray sky. The air carried a trace of freshness from the morning's rain.

Carr turned north, stepping out briskly. For the first time in two hours he began to think of Marcia—and that was a good defense against any sort of fear. He pictured her as he'd last seen her, in an exquisitely tailored black suit and stockings that were a faint dark glow on pale flesh.

But just then his attention was diverted to a small man walking a little way ahead of him at an equally fast pace. Carr's legs were considerably longer, but the small man had a peculiar skip to his stride. He was constantly weaving, seeking the open channels in the crowd.

Carr felt a surge of curiosity. He was tempted to increase his pace so that he could get a look at the stranger's face.

At that moment the small man whirled around. Carr stopped. The small man peered at him through horn-rimmed, thick-lensed glasses. Then a look of extreme horror crossed the stranger's swarthy face. For a moment he crouched as if paralyzed. Then he turned and darted away, dancing past people, scurrying from side to side, finally whisking out of sight around the next corner like a puppet jerked offstage.

Carr wanted to laugh wildly. The frightened girl had written, "But the small dark man with glasses may be your friend." He certainly hadn't acted that way!

Someone bumped into Carr from behind and he started forward again. It was as if the governor of a machine, temporarily out of order, had begun to function. He was back in the rush-hour rhythm.

He looked down the next cross street, but the small dark man was no-

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where in sight.

Carr smiled. It occurred to him that he really had no good reason to believe that this had been the frightened girl's small dark man. After all, there must be tens of thousands of small dark men with glasses in the world.

BUT HE found he couldn't laugh off the incident quite that easily. Not that it brought back the one big fear, but that it reawakened the earlier mood that the frightened girl had evoked—a mood of frustrated excitement, as if all around him there were a hidden world alive with mystery and wonder, to which he couldn't quite find the door.

His memory fixed on the frightened girl. He pictured her as a college kid, the sort who would cut classes in order to sit on the brink of a fountain and argue with some young man about the meaning of art. With pencil smudges on her cheeks. The picture fitted, all right. Only consider the howling naivete of her wondering whether she had "awakened" him.

And yet even that question might cut a lot deeper than you'd think. Wasn't there a sense in which he actually was unawakened?—a person who'd dodged life, who'd always had that sense of a vastly richer and more vivid existence just out of reach.

For that matter, didn't most people live their lives without really ever awakening—as dull as worms, as mechanical as insects, their thoughts spoonfed to them by newspaper and radio? Couldn't robots perform the much over-rated business of living just as well?

As he asked himself that question, the big fear returned. The life drained out of the bobbing faces around him. The scissoring of the many legs became no less mechanical than the spinning of the wheels beyond the curb. The smoky pattern of light and darkness that was Chicago became the dark metal of a giant machine. And once again there was the feeling of something huge and hostile poised behind him.

Back in the office he had found the one thing to do when that feeling struck—go to his place in the machine and pretend to be part of it. But out here what was his place?

He knew in a general way what he had to do. Go home, change, pick up Marcia. But by what route and at what speed?

Each step involved a decision. Should it be fast or slow? Should you glance at shop windows, or keep your eyes fixed ahead? Should you turn at the next corner? If you did, it might change your whole life. Or if you didn't. If you stopped and tried to decide, if you loitered, you might be lost.

But perhaps you were supposed to loiter. Perhaps you were supposed to stop dead, letting the crowd surge past you. Perhaps you were supposed to grin at the robots with twitching lips, gathering your breath for an ear-splitting scream, inviting the pounce of that huge and hostile something.

Or perhaps you were only supposed to go on, step after dragging step, toward the bridge.

CHAPTER IV

A big engine—only every now and then one of the parts comes alive, for no more reason than a radioactive atom pops. That come-alive part is up against a big problem, brother. Don't envy him or her...

BY THE time Carr had crossed the big windy bridge and threaded his way through the dark streets of

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the Near North Side to the old brownstone house in which he rented a room, he had once more mastered the big fear. The hallway was musty and dim. He hurried up the ornately balustraded stairs, relic of the opulent days of the 1890's. A small stained glass window, mostly patches of dark red and purple, gave the only light.

Just as he reached the turn, he thought he saw himself coming toward himself in the gloom. A moment later he recognized the figure for his reflection in the huge old mirror, its frame still showing glints of gilt, that occupied most of the wall space of the landing.

But still he stood there, staring at the dark-engulfed image of a tall, rather slightly built man with light hair and small, regular features.

There he was—Carr Mackay. And all around him was an unknown universe. And just what, in that universe, did Carr Mackay mean or matter? What was the real significance of the dark rhythm that was rushing him through life at an ever hastening pace toward a grave somewhere? Did it have any significance—especially when any break in the rhythm could make it seem so dead and purposeless, an endless marching and countermarching of marionettes?

He ran blindly past his reflection up the stairs.

In the hall above it was darker still. A bulb had burned out and not been replaced. He felt his way down the corridor and unlocked the tall door of his room.

It was high-ceilinged and comfortable, with rich old woodwork that ten layers of cheap paint couldn't quite spoil. There was even an ancient gas fixture swinging out from the wall, though it probably hadn't been used for anything the last thirty years except cooking on the sly. Carr tried to let the place take him and cradle him in its suggestion of the familiar and his life with Marcia and her crowd, make him forget that lost Carr Mackay down there in the mirror. There were his golf clubs in the corner, the box for shirt studs with the theater program beside it, the sleek military hairbrushes Marcia had given him. But tonight they seemed as arbitrary and poignantly useless an assortment of objects as those placed in an Egyptian tomb, to accompany their owner on his long trek through the underworld.

They were not as alive, even, as the long-unopened box of chessmen or the tarnished silver half-pint flask.

He slung his brown suit on a hanger, hung it in the closet, and reached down his blue suit, still in its wrapper from the cleaner's.

There in the gloom he seemed to see the face of the frightened girl. He could make out the hunted eyes, the thin features, the nervous lips.

She knew the doorway to the hidden world, the answer to the question the dark-engulfed Mackay had been asking.

The imagined lips parted, as if she were about to speak.

With an angry exhalation of held breath, Carr jerked back into the room. What could he be thinking? It was only in wistful books that men of thirty-nine fell in love with moody, mysterious, coltish college girls. Or were caught up in the glamorously sinister intrigues that existed solely in such girls' hot-house brains.

He put on his blue suit, then started to transfer to it the stuff in the pockets of the brown one. He came upon the note the frightened girl had scribbled. He must have shoved it there when Tom Elvested had started misbehaving. He turned it over and saw that he hadn't read all of it.

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If you want to meet me again in spite of dangers, I'll be by the lion's tail near the five sisters tonight at eight.

HIS LIPS twisted in a wry smile. If that didn't prove she'd been suckled on *The Prisoner of Zenda* and weaned on *Graustark*, he'd like to know! She probably carried the Rajah's ruby in a bag around her neck and wrote love letters with a black swan's quill—and she could stop haunting his imagination right now!

No, there was no question but that Marcia was the woman for him—charming, successful, competent at both business and pleasure—even if she did like to be tormenting. What competition could be offered by a mere maladjusted girl?

He hurried into the bathroom, rubbing his chin. Marcia liked him to be well-groomed, and his beard felt pretty conspicuous. He looked into the mirror to confirm his suspicions and once again he saw a different Carr Mackay.

The one on the stairs had seemed lost. This one, framed in surgical white, looked trapped. A neat, wooden Mackay who went trudging through life without inquiring what any of the signposts meant. A stupid Mackay. A dummy.

He really ought to shave, yes, but the way he was feeling, the sooner he and Marcia got started drinking, the better. He'd skip shaving this once.

As he made this decision, he was conscious of a disproportionate feeling of guilt.

He'd probably been reading too many "Five O'Clock Shadow" ads.

Forget it.

He hurried into the rest of his clothes, started toward the door, stopped by the bureau, pulled open the top drawer, looked longingly for a moment at the three flat pints of whisky nestling inside. Then he shut the drawer quickly and hurried down the stairs, averting his eyes from the mirror. It was a relief to know that he'd be with Marcia in a few minutes.

But eight dark blocks are eight dark blocks, and they have to be walked, and to walk them takes time no matter how rapidly you stride. Time for your sense of purpose and security to dwindle to nothing. Time to get away from the ads and the pink lights and the radio voices and to think a little about the universe—to realize that it's a place of mystification and death, with no more feeling than a sausage grinder for the life oozing through it.

The buildings to either side became the walls of a black runway, and the occasional passers-by shadow-swathed automatons. He became conscious of the dark rhythm of existence as a nerve-twisting, insistent thing that tugged at him like a marionette's strings, trying to drag him back to some pattern from which he had departed.

Being with Marcia would fix him up, he told himself, as the dark facades crept slowly by. She at least couldn't ever become a stranger.

But he had forgotten her face.

A trivial thing. A face is as easy to forget as the special place where you've put something for safe-keeping.

Carr tried to remember it. A hundred faces blinked and faded in his mind, some of them so hauntingly suggestive of Marcia that for a moment he would think, "That's her," some of them grotesquely different.

Light from a first story window spilled on the face of a girl in a blue slicker just as she passed him. His heart pounded. He had almost grabbed her and said, "Marcia!" And

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she hadn't been Marcia's type at all.

He walked faster. The apartment tower where Marcia lived edged into sight, grew threateningly tall.

HE HURRIED up the flagstone walk flanked by shrubbery. The lobby was a long low useless room with lots of carved wood and red leather. He stopped at the desk. The clerk was talking to someone over the phone. Carr waited, but the clerk seemed determined to prolong the conversation. Carr cleared his throat. The clerk yawned and languorously flexed the arm that held the receiver, as if to call attention to the gold seal ring and cuff-linked wrist.

A few steps beyond, the elevator was waiting. Although he knew Marcia always liked him to call up first, Carr delayed no longer. He walked into the cage and said, "Seven, please."

But the tiny gray-haired woman did not move. She seemed to be asleep. She was perched on her stool in front of the panel of buttons like some weary old jungle bird. Carr started to touch her shoulder, but at the last moment reached impulsively beyond to press the seven button.

The door closed with a soft crunch and the cage started upward. The ring of keys at the operator's waist jingled faintly, but she did not wake. Her lips worked and she muttered faintly.

The cage stopped at seven. Again the keys jingled faintly. The door opened. With one last glance at the sleeping woman, Carr stepped softly out. Just before he reached Marcia's door, he heard the operator make a funny little sound between a yawn and a sigh and a laugh, and he heard the door close and the cage start down.

In front of Marcia's door Carr hesitated. She mightn't like him barging in this way. But who could be expected always to await the pleasure of that prissy clerk?

Behind him he heard the cage stop at the ground floor.

He noticed that the door he faced was ajar.

He pushed it open a few inches.

"Marcia," he called. "Marcia?" His voice came out huskily.

He stepped inside. The white-shaded lamp showed dull pearl walls, white bookcase, blue overstuffed sofa with a coat and yellow silk scarf tossed across it, and a faint curl of cigarette smoke.

The bedroom door was open. He crossed to it, his footsteps soundless on the thick carpet. He stopped.

Marcia was sitting at the dressing table. She was wearing a light gray negligee with a silvery sheen. It touched and fell away from her figure in graceful folds, half revealing her breasts. A squashed cigarette smoldered in a tiny silver ash tray. She was lacquering her nails.

That was all. But to Carr it seemed that he had blundered into one of those elaborately realistic department store window displays. He almost expected to see faces peering in the dark window, seven stories up.

Modern bedroom in rose and smoke. Seated mannequin at vanity table. Perhaps a placard in script: "Point up your Pinks with Gray."

He stood stupidly a step short of the doorway, saying nothing.

In the mirror her eyes seemed to meet his. She went on lacquering her nails.

She might be angry with him for not phoning from downstairs. But it wasn't like Marcia to choose this queer way of showing her displeasure.

Or was it?

He watched her face in the mirror. It was the one he had forgotten, all

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right. There were the firm lips, the cool forehead framed by reddish hair, the fleeting quirks of expression—definitely hers.

Yet recognition did not bring the sense of absolute certainty it should. Something was lacking—the feeling of a reality behind the face, animating it.

SHE FINISHED her nails and held them out to dry. The negligee fell open a bit further.

Could this be another of her tricks for tormenting him? Marcia, he knew, thoroughly enjoyed his helpless desire and especially those fits of shyness for which he berated himself afterwards.

But she wouldn't draw it out so long.

A sharp surge of uneasiness went through Carr. This was nonsensical, he told himself. In another moment she must move or speak—or *he* must. But his throat was constricted and his legs felt numb.

And then it came back: the big fear.

What if Marcia weren't really alive at all, not consciously alive, but just a part of a dance of mindless atoms, a clockworks show that included the whole world, except himself? Merely by coming a few minutes ahead of time, merely by omitting to shave, he had broken the clockworks rhythm. That was why the clerk hadn't spoken to him, why the operator had been asleep, why Marcia didn't greet him. It wasn't time yet for those little acts in the clockworks show.

The creamy telephone tinkled. Lifting it gingerly, fingers stiffly spread, the figure at the vanity held it to her ear a moment and said, "Thank you. Tell him to come up."

She inspected her nails, waved them, looked at her reflection in the glass, belted her negligee.

Through the open door Carr could hear the drone of the rising cage.

Marcia started to get up, hesitated, sat down again, smiled.

The cage stopped. There was the soft jolt of its door opening. He heard the operator's voice, but no one else's. He waited for footsteps. They didn't come.

That was *his* elevator, he thought with a shudder, the one *he* was supposed to come up in. The woman had brought it to seven without him, for that was part of the clockworks show.

Suddenly Marcia turned. "Darling," she called, rising quickly, "the door's open." She came toward him.

The hairs on the back of his neck lifted. She wasn't looking straight at him, he felt, but at something behind him. *She was watching him come through the living room.*

She moistened her lips. Her arms went out to him. Just before they touched him, Carr jerked back.

The arms closed on air. Marcia lifted her face. Her back arched as if there were a strong arm around it. There was the sloppy sound of a kiss.

Carr shook as he backed across the living room. "That's enough for you, darling," he heard Marcia murmur sharply to the air. He spun around and darted into the hall—not to the elevator, but to the stairs beyond.

As he plunged down them in strides that were nightmarishly long and slow, a thought popped to the surface of his whirling mind.

The meaning of a phrase he had read uncomprehendingly an hour before: "...the lion's tail near the five sisters..."

CHAPTER V

If you catch on to the secret, you'd better keep your mouth shut. It never brought anybody anything but grief. If you've got friends, the kindest thing you can do for them is not to let them find out...

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Her hands fondly caressed the phantom shape while he stood watching in amazement...

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FEW PEOPLE walk on the east side of Michigan Boulevard after dark. At such times the Art Institute looks very dead. Headlights coming down Adams play on its dark stone like archeologists' flashlights. The two majestic bronze lions might be guarding the portals of some monument of Roman antiquity. The tail of one of the lions, conveniently horizontal and kept polished by the casual elbows of art students and idlers, now served as a backrest for the frightened girl.

She silently watched Carr mount the steps. He might be part of some dream she was having. A forbiddingly cold wind was whipping in from the lake and she had buttoned up her cardigan. Carr stopped a half dozen paces away.

After a moment she smiled and said, "Hello."

Carr smiled jerkily in reply and moved toward her. His first words surprised him.

"I met your small dark man with glasses. He ran away."

"Oh? I'm sorry. He really might be your friend. But he's . . . timid," she added, her lips setting in bitter lines. "He can't always be depended on. He was supposed to meet me here, but . . ." She glanced, shrugging her shoulders, toward the electric numerals glowing high above the north end of Grant Park. "I had some vague idea of introducing the two of you, but now I'm not so sure." The wind blew strands of her shoulder-length hair against her cheek. "I never really thought you'd come, you know. Leaving notes like that is just a way I have of tempting fate. You weren't supposed to guess. How did you know it was one of these lions?"

Carr laughed. "Taft's Great Lakes fountain is a minor obsession of mine. I always try to figure out which of the five sisters is which lake. And of course that's just around the corner." He instantly grew serious again and moved closer to her. "I want to ask you a question," he said.

"Yes?" she asked guardedly.

"Do you think I'm insane?"

Headlights from Adams swept across her gray eyes, enigmatic as those of a sphinx. "That's hardly a question for a stranger to answer." She looked at him a while longer and shook her head. "No, I don't," she said softly.

"All right," he said, "grant I'm sane. Then answer this: Do you think it's reasonably possible for a sane person to meet eight or ten insane ones, some of them people he knows, all in one day? And I don't mean in an asylum."

"I don't know," she whispered. Then, unwillingly, "I suppose not."

"All right," he said. "Then comes the big question: Do you think . . . (He had trouble getting the words out) ". . . that most people are really alive?"

She seemed to shrink in size. Her face was all in shadow. "I don't understand," she faltered.

"I mean," he said, "do you really believe there's anything behind most people's foreheads but blackness? Do they really think and act, or are they just mindless parts of a mindless pattern?" His voice grew stronger. "Do you think that all that—" (He swept his hand along the boulevard and the towering buildings and the darkness) "—is really alive, or contains life? Or is all Chicago just a big machine, with people for parts?"

SHE FAIRLY sprang at him from the shadows. The next instant her hands were gripping his together and her strained and apprehensive face was inches from his own.

"Never think that!" she told him

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rapidly. "Don't even toy with such crazy ideas!"

"Why not?" he demanded, his imprisoned hands throbbing as if from an electric shock. "If you'd seen what I've seen today—"

Without warning she laughed gayly, loosed his tingling hands, and spun away from him. "Idiot!" she said in a voice that rippled with laughter, "I know what's happened to you. You've been scared by life. You've magnified a few funny things into a morbid idea."

"A few funny things?" he demanded, confused by her startling change of behavior. "Why, if you'd seen—"

"I don't care!" she interrupted with triumphant gayety. "Whatever it is, it's foolishness." Her eyes, dancing with an infectious excitement, fixed on his. "Come with me," she said, "and I'll show you that all that—" (She swept her hand, as he had, at the boulevard) "—is safe and warm and friendly."

"But—" he began.

She danced toward him. "Is it a date?" she asked.

"Well—"

"Is it, Mr. Serious?"

He couldn't stop a big grin. "Yes," he told her.

She held up a finger. "You've got to remember that this is *my* date, that I pick the places we go and that whatever I do, you fall in with it."

"Like follow-the-leader?"

"Exactly like follow-the-leader. Tonight I'm showing you Chicago. That's the agreement."

"All right," he said.

"Then come on."

"What's your name?" he said, catching her elbow.

"Jane," she told him.

"Jane what?"

"You don't need to know," she replied impishly.

"Wait a minute," he said, pulling them to a stop. "Is it Jane Gregg?"

He couldn't tell from her face whether that question meant anything to her. "I won't tell you," she said, pulling at him.

"Do you know Tom Elvested?" he continued.

"I won't answer foolish questions like that," she assured him. "Oh come on, you've got to get in the spirit of the thing, what's-your-name."

"Carr. Two R's," he told her.

"Then we turn north here, Carr," she told him.

"Where to?" he asked.

She looked at him severely. "Follow the leader," she reminded him and laughed and raced ahead. He had to run to keep up with her, and by that time he was laughing too.

They were a block from the Institute when Carr asked, "What about your friend, though—the small dark man with glasses?"

"I don't care," she said. "If he comes now, he can have a date with the five sisters."

"Incidently," Carr asked, "what's his real name?"

"I honestly don't know."

"Are they after him too?" Carr persisted, his voice growing somber.

"Who?"

"Those three people you warned me against."

"I don't want to talk about them." Her voice was suddenly flat. "They're obscene and horrible and I don't want to think about them at all."

"But look, Jane, what sort of hold do they have on you? Why did you let that big blonde slap you without doing anything?"

"I tell you I won't talk about them! If you go on like this, there won't be any date." She turned on him, gripping his arm. "Oh Carr, you're spoiling everything," she told him, close to

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tears. "Do get in the spirit, like you promised."

"All right," he said gently, "I will, really." He linked his arm through hers and for a while they walked in silence. The wind and the gloom and the wide empty sidewalk seemed strange and lonely so close to the boulevard with its humming cars and its fringe of people and lights on the other side.

Her arm tightened a little on his. "This is fun," she said.

"What?"

"Having a date."

"I shouldn't think you'd have any trouble," he told her.

"Oh? You don't know anything about my troubles—and we're not going to talk about them tonight! Here we turn again."

THEY WERE opposite the public library. She led him across the boulevard. It seemed to Carr the loneliness followed them, for they passed only two people as they went by the library.

They squinted against blown grit. A sheet of newspaper flapped against their faces. Carr ripped it away and it swooped up into the air.

Jane led him down a cobbled alley choked with fire escapes, down some steps and into a little tavern.

The place was dimly lit. None of the booths were occupied. At the bar two men contemplated half empty glasses of beer.

"What'll you have?" Carr asked Jane.

"Let's wait a bit," she said, steering him instead to the last booth. Neither the two drinkers nor the fat and solemn bartender looked up as they went past.

They looked at each other across the splotched table. Color had come into Jane's cheeks. Carr found himself thinking of college days, when there had been hip flasks and roadsters and checks from home and classes to cut.

"It's funny," he said, "I've gone past this alley a hundred times and never noticed this place."

"Cities are like that," she said. "You think you know them when all you know are routes through them."

We're even beginning to talk about life, Carr thought.

One of the beer-drinkers put two nickels in the jukebox. Low strains eddied out.

Carr looked toward the bar. "Maybe they don't serve at the tables now," he said.

"Who cares?" she said. "Let's dance."

"I don't imagine it's allowed," he said. "They'd have to have another license."

"I told you you were scared of life," she said gayly. "Come on."

There wasn't much space, but enough. With what struck Carr as a grave and laudable politeness, the beer-drinkers paid no attention to them at all, though one beat time softly with the bottom of his glass against his palm.

Jane danced badly, but after a while she got better. Somewhat solemnly they revolved in a modest circle. She said nothing until almost the end of the first number. Then, in a choked voice—

"It's been so long since I've danced with anyone."

"Not with your man with glasses?" Carr asked.

She shook her head. "He's too scared of life all the time. He can't relax—not even pretend."

The second record started. Her expression cleared. She rested her cheek against his shoulder. "I've got a theory about life," she said dreamily. "I think life has a rhythm. It keeps

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changing with the time of day and year, but it's always there. People feel it without knowing it and it governs their lives."

"Like the music of the spheres?" Carr suggested.

"Yes, only that makes it sound too nice."

"What do you mean, Jane?"

"Nothing."

Another couple came in, took one of the front booths. The bartender wiped his hands on his apron, pushed up a wicket in the bar, and walked over to them.

The music stopped. Carr dug in his pocket for more nickels, but she shook her head. They slid back into their booth.

"I hope I didn't embarrass you," she said.

"Of course not."

A TELEPHONE rang. The fat bartender carefully put down the tray of drinks he had mixed for the other couple and went to answer it.

"Sure you don't want to dance some more?" Carr asked.

"No, let's just let things happen to us."

"A good idea," Carr agreed, "provided you don't push it too far. For instance, we did come here to get a drink, didn't we?"

"Yes, we did," Jane agreed. The impish expression returned to her eyes. She glanced at the two drinks standing on the bar. "Those look good," she said, "Let's have those."

He looked at her. "Seriously?"

"Why not? We were here first. Are you scared of life?"

He grinned at her and got up suddenly. She didn't stop him, rather to his surprise. Much more so, there was no squawk when he boldly clutched the glasses and returned with them.

Jane applauded soundlessly. He bowed and set down the drinks with a flourish. They sipped.

She smiled. "That's another of my theories. You can get away with anything if you aren't scared. Other people can't stop you, because they're more scared than you are."

Carr smiled at her.

"What's that for?" she asked.

"Do you know the first name I gave you?" he asked.

"No."

"The frightened girl. Incidently, what did startle you so when you sat down at my desk this afternoon. You seemed to sense something in me that terrified you. What was it?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know. You're getting serious again," she warned him.

He grinned. "I guess I am."

More people had begun to drift in. By the time they finished their drinks, all the other booths were filled. Jane was getting uneasy.

"Let's go somewhere else," she said abruptly, standing up.

Carr started to reply, but she had slipped around a couple approaching their booth and was striding toward the door. A fear took hold of him that she would get away like this afternoon and he would never see her again. He jerked a dollar bill from his pocketbook and dropped it on the table. With nettling rudeness the newcomers shoved past him and sat down. But there was no time to be sarcastic. Jane was already mounting the stairs. He ran after her.

She was waiting outside. He took her arm.

"Do people get on your nerves?" he asked, "so you can't stand being with too many of them for too long?"

She did not answer, but in the darkness her hand reached over and touched his.

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CHAPTER VI

Don't let on you know the secret, even to yourself. Pretend you don't know that the people around you are dead, or as good as dead. That's what you'll do, brother, if you play it safe...

THEY EMERGED from the alley into a street where the air had an intoxicating glow, as if the lamps puffed out clouds of luminous dust which rose for three or four stories into the dark.

They passed a music store. Jane's walk slowed to an indecisive drift. Through the open door Carr glimpsed a mahogany expanse of uprights, spinets, baby grands. Jane suddenly walked in. The sound of their footsteps died as they stepped onto the thick carpet.

Whoever else was in the store was out of sight somewhere in the back. Jane sat down at one of the pianos. Her fingers quested for a while over the keys. Then her back stiffened, her head lifted, and there came the frantically rippling arpeggios of the third movement of Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata.

She didn't play it any too well, yet she did manage to extract from it a feeling of wild, desperate wonder. Surely if the composer had ever meant this to be moonlight, it was moonlight illumining a white-pinnacled ocean storm or, through rifts in ragged clouds, the Brocken on *Walpurgis Nacht.*

Suddenly it was over. In the echoing quiet Carr asked, "Is that more like it? The rhythm of life, I mean?"

She made a little grimace as she got up. "Still too nice," she said, "but there's a hint."

They started out. Carr looked back over his shoulder, but the store was still empty. He felt a twinge of returning fear.

"Do you realize that we haven't spoken with anybody but each other tonight?" he asked.

She smiled woefully. "I think of pretty dull things to do, don't I?" she said, and when he started to protest, "No, I'm afraid you'd have had a lot more fun tonight with some other girl."

"Listen," he said, "I did have a date with another girl and...oh, I don't want to talk about it."

Her voice was odd, almost close to tears. "You'd even have had more fun with Midge's girl-friend."

"Say, you do have a memory," he began. Then, turning on her, "Aren't you really Jane Gregg? Don't you know Tom Elvested and Midge?"

She shook her head reprovingly and looked up with an uneven smile. "But since you haven't got a date with anybody but me, Mr. Serious, you'll have to make the best of my antisocial habits. Let's see, I could let you look at some other girls undressing on North Clark or West Madison, or we could go to the symphony, or..."

They were passing the painfully bright lobby of a movie house, luridly placarded with yellow and purple swirls which seemed to have caught up in their whirlwind folds an unending rout of golden blondes, grim-eyed heroes, money bags, and grasping hands. Jane stopped.

"Or I could take you in here," she said.

He obediently veered toward the box office, but she kept hold of his arm and walked him past it into the outer lobby.

"You mustn't be scared of life," she told him, half gayly, half desperately, he thought. "You must learn to take risks. You really can get away with anything."

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Carr shrugged and held his breath for the inevitable.

They walked straight past the ticket-taker and through the center-aisle door.

Carr puffed out his breath and grinned. He thought, maybe she knows someone here. Or else—who knows?—maybe you *could* get away with almost anything if you did it with enough assurance and picked the right moments.

THE THEATER was only half full. They sidled through the blinking darkness into one of the empty rows at the back. Soon the gyrations of the gray shadows on the screen took on a little sense.

There were a man and woman getting married, or else remarried after a divorce, it was hard to tell which. Then she left him because she thought that he was interested only in business. Then she came back, but he left her because he thought she was interested only in social affairs. Then he came back, but then they both left each other again, simultaneously.

From all around came the soft breathing and somnolent gum-chewing of drugged humanity.

Then the man and woman both raced to the bedside of their dying little boy, who had been tucked away in a military academy. But the boy recovered, and then the woman left both of them, for their own good, and a little while afterwards the man did the same thing. Then the boy left them.

"Do you play chess?" Jane asked suddenly.

Carr nodded gratefully.

"Come on," she said. "I know a place."

They hurried out of the bustling theater district into an empty region of silent gray office buildings—for the Loop is a strange place, where loneliness jostles too much companionship. Looking up at the dark and dingy heights, Carr felt his uneasiness begin to return. There was something exceedingly horrible in the thought of miles on miles of darkened offices, empty but for the endless desks, typewriters, filing cabinets, water coolers. What would a stranger from Mars deduce from them? Surely not human beings.

With a great roar a cavalcade of newspaper trucks careened across the next corner, plunging as frantically as if the fate of nations were at stake. Carr took a backward step, his heart pounding.

Jane smiled at him. "We're safe tonight," she said and led him to a massive office building of the last century. Pushing through a side door next to the locked revolving one, she drew him into a dingy lobby floored with tiny white tiles and surrounded by the iron latticework of ancient elevator shafts. A jerkily revolving hand showed that one cage was still in operation, but Jane headed for the shadow-stifled stairs.

"I hope you don't mind," she said. "It's thirteen stories, but I can't stand elevators."

Remembering the one at Marcia's apartment, Carr was glad.

They emerged panting in a hall where the one frosted door that wasn't dark read CAISSA CHESS CLUB.

Behind the door was a long room. A drab austerity, untidy rows of small tables, and a grimy floor littered with trodden cigarettes, all proclaimed the place to be the headquarters of a somber monomania.

Some oldsters were playing near the door, utterly absorbed in the game. One with a dirty white beard was silently kibitzing, occasionally shaking his head, or pointing out with palsied fingers the move that would have

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won if it had been made.

Carr and Jane walked quietly beyond them, found a box of men as battered by long use as the half obliterated board, and started to play.

Soon the maddening, years-forgotten excitement gripped Carr tight. He was back in that dreadful little universe where the significance of things is narrowed down to the strategems whereby turreted rooks establish intangible walls of force, bishops slip craftily through bristling barricades, and knights spring out in sudden sidewise attacks, as if from crooked medieval passageways.

They played three slow, merciless games. She won the first two. He finally drew the third, his king just managing to nip off her last runaway pawn. It felt very late, getting on toward morning.

She leaned back massaging her face.

"Nothing like chess," she mumbled, "to take your mind off things." Then she dropped her hands.

TWO MEN were still sitting at the first table in their overcoats, napping over the board. They tiptoed past them and out into the hall and went down the stairs. An old woman was wearily scrubbing her way across the lobby, her head bent as if forever.

In the street they paused uncertainly. It had grown quite chilly.

"Where do you live?" Carr asked.

"I'd rather you didn't—" Jane began and stopped. After a moment she said, "All right, you can take me home. But it's a long walk and you must still follow the leader."

The Loop was deserted except for the darkness and the hungry wind. They crossed the black Chicago River on Michigan Boulevard, where the skyscrapers are thickest. It looked like the Styx. They walked rapidly. They didn't say anything. Carr's arm was tightly linked around hers. He felt sad and tired and yet very much at peace. He knew he was leaving this girl forever and going back to his own world. Any vague notion he'd had of making her a real friend had died in the cold ebb of night.

Yet at the same time he knew that she had helped him. All his worries and fears, including the big one, were gone. The events of the afternoon and early evening seemed merely bizarre, a mixture of hoaxes and trivial illusions. Tomorrow he must begin all over again, with his job and his pleasures. Marcia, he told himself, had only been playing a fantastic prank—he'd patch things up with her.

As if sensing his thoughts, Jane shrank close to his side.

Past the turn-off to his apartment, past the old white water tower, they kept on down the boulevard. It seemed tremendously wide without cars streaming through it.

They turned down a street where big houses hid behind black space and trees.

Jane stopped in front of a tall iron gate. High on one of the stone pillars supporting it, too high for Jane to see, Carr idly noted a yellow chalk-mark in the shape of a cross with dots between the arms. Wondering if it were a tramps' sign commenting on the stinginess or generosity of the people inside, Carr suddenly got the picture his mind had been fumbling for all night. It fitted Jane, her untidy expensive clothes, her shy yet arrogant manner. She must be a rich man's daughter, overprotected, neurotic, futilely rebellious, tyrannized over by relatives and servants. Everything in her life mixed up, futilely and irremediably, in the way only money can manage.

"It's been so nice," Jane said in a choked voice, not looking at him, "so

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nice to pretend."

She fumbled in her pocket, but whether for a handkerchief or a key Carr could not tell. Something small and white slipped from her hand and fluttered through the fence. She pushed open the gate enough to get through.

"Please don't come in with me," she whispered. "And please don't stay and watch."

Carr thought he knew why. She didn't want him to watch the lights wink agitatedly on, perhaps hear the beginning of an anxious tirade. It was her last crumb of freedom—to leave him with the illusion she was free.

He took her in his arms. He felt in the darkness the tears on her cold cheek wetting his. Then she had broken away. There were footsteps running up a gravel drive. He turned and walked swiftly away.

In the sky, between the pale streets, was the first paleness of dawn.

CHAPTER VII

Keep looking straight ahead, brother. It doesn't do to get too nosy. You may see things going on in the big engine that'll make you wish you'd never come alive...

THROUGH slitted, sleep-heavy eyes Carr saw the clock holding up both hands in horror. The room was drenched in sunshine.

But he did not hurl himself out of bed, tear into his clothes, and rush downtown, just because it was half past eleven.

Instead he yawned and closed his eyes, savoring the feeling of self-confidence that filled him. He had a profound sense of being back on the right track.

Odd that a queer neurotic girl could give you so much. But nice.

Grinning, he got up and leisurely bathed and shaved.

He'd have breakfast downtown, he decided. Something a little special. Then amble over to the office about the time his regular lunch hour ended.

He even thought of permitting himself the luxury of taking a cab to the Loop. But as soon as he got outside he changed his mind. The sun and the air, and the blue of lake and sky, and the general feeling of muscle-stretching spring, when even old people crawl out of their holes, were too enticing. He felt fresh. Plenty of time. He'd walk.

The city showed him her best profile. As if he were a god briefly sojourning on earth, he found pleasure in inspecting the shifting scene and the passing people.

They seemed to feel as good as he did. Even the ones hurrying fastest somehow gave the impression of strolling. Carr enjoyed sliding past them like a stick drifting in a slow, whimsical current.

If life has a rhythm, he thought, it has sunk to a lazy summer murmur from the strings.

His mind played idly with last night's events. He wondered if he could find Jane's imposing home again. He decided he probably could, but felt no curiosity. Already she was beginning to seem like a girl in a dream. They'd met, helped each other, parted. A proper episode.

He came to the bridge. Down on the sparkling river deckhands were washing an excursion steamer. The skyscrapers rose up clean and gray, Cities, he thought, could be lovely places at time, so huge and yet so bright and sane and filled with crowds of people among whom you were indistinguishable and therefore secure. Undoubtedly this was the pleasantest half-hour he'd had in months. To crown it, he decided

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he'd drop into one of the big department stores and make some totally unnecessary purchase. Necktie perhaps. Say a new blue.

Inside the store the crowd was thicker. Pausing to spy out the proper counter, Carr had the faintest feeling of oppressiveness. For a moment he felt the impulse to hurry outside. But he smiled at it. He located the neckties—they were across the huge room—and started toward them. But before he'd got halfway he stopped again, this time to enjoy a sight as humorously bizarre as a cartoon in *The New Yorker*.

Down the center aisle, their eyes fixed stonily ahead, avoiding the shoppers with a casual adroitness, marched four youngish men carrying a window-display mannequin. The four men were wearing identical light-weight black overcoats and black snap-brim hats which looked as if they'd just been purchased this morning. The two in front each held an ankle, the two in back a shoulder. The mannequin was dressed in an ultra-stylish olive green suit, the face and hands were finished in some realistic nude felt, and her arms were rigidly fixed to hold a teacup or an open purse.

THERE WAS something so ludicrous about the costume of the four men and their unconcern, both for the shoppers and for the figure they were carrying, that it was all Carr could do not to burst out laughing. As it was, he was relieved that none of the four men happened to look his way and catch his huge grin.

He studied them delightedly, wondering what weird circumstances had caused this bit of behind-the-scenes department-store business to take place in front of everyone.

Oddly, no one else seemed aware of how amusing they looked. It was something for Carr's funny-bone alone.

He watched until they were well past him. Almost regretfully, he turned away toward the tie counter. But just then the rigid right arm of the mannequin unfolded and dropped down slackly, and the head fell back, and the dark-lashed eyes flickered and fixed on him a sick, doomed stare.

Carr was not quite sure how he got out of the store without screaming or running. There was a blank space of panic in his memory. The next thing he remembered clearly was pushing his way through the ocean of unseeing faces on State Street. By then he had begun to rationalize the event. Perhaps the mannequin's arm worked on a pivot, and its swinging down had startled him into imagining the rest. Of course the hand had looked soft and limp and helpless as it dragged along the floor, but that could have been imagination too.

After all, a world in which people could "turn off" other people like clockwork toys and cart them away just wasn't possible—even if it would help to explain some of the hundreds of mysterious disappearances that occur every month.

No, it had all been his damnable imagination. Just the same, his mood of calm self-confidence was shattered and he was tormented by a sudden sense of guilt about his lateness. He must get back to the office as quickly as he could. Behind his desk he'd find security.

The five blocks to General Employment seemed fifty. More than once he looked back uneasily. He found himself searching the crowd for black snap-brim hats.

He hurried furtively through the lobby and up the stairs. After hesitating a moment outside, he gathered his courage and entered the applicants'

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waiting room.

He looked through the glass panel. The big blonde who had slapped Jane was sitting in his swivel chair, rummaging through the drawers of his desk.

CHAPTER VIII

What's a mean guy do when he finds out other guys and girls are as good as dead? He trots out all the nasty notions he's been keeping warm inside his rotten little heart. Now I can get away with them, he figures...

CARR DIDN'T move. His first impulse was to confront the woman, but right on its heels came the realization that she'd hardly be acting this way without some sort of authorization—and hardly obtain an authorization without good cause.

His mind, instinctively preferring realistic fears to worse ones, jumped back to a fleeting suspicion that Jane was mixed up in some sort of crime. This woman might be a detective.

But detectives didn't go around slapping people, at least not before they arrested them. Yet this woman had a distinctly professional look about her, bold as brass as she sat there going through his stuff.

On the other hand, she might have walked into the office without anyone's permission, trusting to bluff to get away with it.

Carr studied her through the glass panel. She was more beautiful than he'd realized yesterday. With that lush figure, faultless blonde hair, and challenging lips, she might be a model for billboard advertisements. Even the slight out-of-focus look of her eyes didn't spoil her attractiveness. And her gray sports outfit looked like five hundred dollars or so.

Yet there was something off-key about even her good looks and get-up. She carried the lush figure with a blank animal assurance. There was a startling and unashamed barbarousness in the two big silver pins piercing her mannish gray sports hat. And she seemed utterly unconcerned with the people around her. Carr felt strangely cowed.

But the situation was impossible, he told himself. You didn't let someone search your desk without objecting. Tom Elvested, apparently busy with some papers at the next desk, must be wondering what the devil the woman was up to. So must the others.

Just then she dropped a folder back, shut a drawer, and stood up, Carr faded back into the men's room. He waited perhaps fifteen seconds, then cautiously stepped out. The woman was no longer in sight. The outside corridor was empty. He ran to the head of the stairs and spotted the gray sports coat going through the revolving door. He hurried down the stairs, hesitated, then darted into the small tobacco and magazine store opening on the lobby. He could probably still catch a glimpse of her through the store's show window. It would be less conspicuous than dashing right out on the sidewalk.

The store was empty except for the proprietor and a rather portly and well-dressed man whose back was turned. The latter instantly attracted Carr's attention by a startlingly nervy action. Without a word or a glance at the proprietor, he leaned across the counter, selected a pack of cigarettes, tore it open from top to bottom with a twisting motion, selected one of the undamaged cigarettes and dropped the rest on the floor.

The proprietor didn't say anything.

Carr's snap-reaction was that at last he'd seen a big-shot racketeer following his true impulses. Then he fol-

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lowed the portly man's gaze to the street door and saw a patch of familiar gray approaching.

THE LOBBY door was too far away. Carr sidled behind a magazine rack just as he heard the street door opening.

The first voice was the woman's. It was as disagreeably brassy as her manner. "I searched his desk. There wasn't anything suspicious."

"And you did a good job?" The portly man's voice was a jolly one. "Took your time? Didn't miss anything?"

"Of course."

"Hmm." Carr heard the whir of a lighter and the faint crackle of a cigarette igniting. His face was inches away from a line of luridly covered magazines.

"What are you so worried about?" The woman sounded quarrelsome. "Can't you take my word for it? I checked on them both yesterday. She didn't blink when I slapped her."

"Worry pays, Hackman." The portly man sounded even pleasanter. "We have strong reason to suspect the girl. We've seen her—or a very similar girl—with the small dark man with glasses. I respect your intelligence, Hackman, but I'm not completely satisfied. We'll do another check on the girl tonight."

"Where?"

"At the apartment."

"But we don't even know if it's the same girl."

"Perhaps we can find out tonight. There may be photographs."

"Pft!" Now the woman was getting really snappish. "I think it's just your desire for her that keeps you doing these things. You hate to realize she's no use to you. You want to keep alive a dream."

The portly man chuckled. "Very often prudence and self-indulgence go hand in hand, Hackman. We'll do another check on her."

"But aren't we supposed to have any time for fun?"

"Fun must be insured, Hackman. Hardly be fun at all, if you felt someone might spoil it. And then if some other crowd should catch on to us through this girl... No, we'll do another check."

"Oh, all right!" The woman's voice expressed disgusted resignation. "Though I suppose it'll mean prowling around for hours with the hound."

"Hmm. No, I hardly think the hound will be necessary."

Carr, staring sightlessly at the pulp and astrology magazines and the bosomy paper-bound books, felt his flesh crawl.

"Why not let Dris do it?" he heard the woman suggest. "He's had the easy end lately."

The portly man laughed dispassionately. "Do you think I'm going to let Dris work on the girl alone, when I'm the one who's to have her if it turns out she's a live one? And would you trust Dris in that situation?"

"Certainly! Dris wouldn't look at anyone but me!"

"Really?" The portly man's laughter was even colder. "I seem to recall you saying something of the sort about the small dark man with glasses."

The woman's answer was a catsnarl that made Carr jerk. "Don't ever mention that filthy traitor to me again, Wilson! I can't sleep nights for thinking of giving him to the hound!"

"I respect your feelings, Hackman," the portly man said placatingly, "and I certainly applaud your plans for the chap, if we ever find him. But look here, facts are facts. I had you—and a very pleasant experience it was, Hackman. You had...er...the chap

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and then Dris. So in a sense you're one up on me—"

"I'll say I am!"

"—and so I want to be very sure that I'm the one who gets the next girl. Dris will have to wait a while before he's allowed a conquest."

"Dris will have no one but me! Ever!"

"Of course, Hackman, of course," the portly man buttered.

Just then there was a rush of footsteps outside. Carr heard the street door open fast.

"What the devil is it, Dris?" the portly man managed to say before a new, hard voice blurted, "We've got to get out of here fast. I just saw the four men with black hats!"

THERE WAS a scramble of footsteps. The door closed. Carr peered around the rack. Through the window he could see the big blonde and the portly man entering a long black convertible. The driver was a young man with a crew haircut. As he opened the front door for the others, Carr saw that his right arm ended in a hooking contrivance. He felt a thrill of recognition. These were the people Jane had mentioned in her note, all right. "...affable-seeming older man..." Yes, it fitted.

The driver's hand and hook clamped on the wheel. The blonde, scrambling into the front seat ahead of the portly man, dangled her hand momentarily above the back seat. Something gray flashed up at it. The blonde jerked back her hand and made what might have been a threatening gesture. Carr felt a shiver crawling along his back. Perhaps the blonde had merely flirted up the corner of a gray fur driving robe. But it was almost summer and the gray flash had been very quick.

The convertible began to move swiftly. Carr hurried to the window. He got there in time to see the convertible swinging around the next corner, too fast for sensible downtown driving.

Carr returned. The proprietor was still standing behind the counter, head bowed, busy—or pretending to be busy—with some printed forms.

Just then Carr's mind got around to the phrase, "the four men with black hats."

He didn't go back to the window to look for them. He hurried out of the shop and up the stairs and got behind his desk as fast as he could. His mind was occupied by the two things he felt he must do. First, stick out the afternoon at the office. Second, get to Jane and warn her.

Just as he sat down at his desk, his phone rang.

It was Marcia. "Hello, darling," she said, "I'm going to do something I make it a rule never to do to a man."

"What's that?" he asked automatically.

"Thank him. It really was a lovely evening, dear. I've never known the food at the Kungsholm to be better."

"I don't get it," Carr said stupidly, remembering his flight from Marcia's apartment. "We didn't—"

"And then that charming fellow we met," Marcia interrupted. "I mean Kirby Fisher. Darling, he seems to have oodles of money."

"I don't get it at all—" Carr persisted and then stopped, frozen by a vision of Marcia dining across the table from a man who wasn't there, of Marcia and her invisible man meeting a certain Kirby Fisher and perhaps Kirby shaking hands with the invisible man and the three of them talking together, with gaps for the invisible man's remarks. For if yesterday's big fear were true and the world were a machine, and if he'd

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jumped out of his place in the machine when he ran away from Marcia last night to be with Jane—

" 'Bye now, darling," Marcia said. "Be properly grateful."

"Wait a minute, Marcia," he said, speaking rapidly. "Do you actually mean—"

But the phone clicked and started to buzz, and Tom Elvested came gallumphing over.

"Look," Tom said, "I know it was too short notice when I asked you to go out with me and Midge and Jane Gregg last night. But now you've seen what a charming girl she is, how about the four of us getting together Saturday?"

"Well..." Carr said confusedly, hardly knowing what Tom had been saying.

"Swell," Tom told him. "It's a date."

"Wait a minute, Tom," Carr said rapidly. "Is this Jane Gregg a slim girl with long untidy dark hair?"

But Tom had returned to his own desk, and an applicant was approaching Carr's.

SOMEHOW CARR got through the afternoon. His mind kept jumping around in a funny way. He kept seeing the pulp magazines in the rack downstairs. For several minutes he was bothered by something gray poking around the end of one of the benches in the waiting room, until he realized it was a woman's handbag. And there was the constant fear that he'd lose contact with the people he was interviewing, that the questions and answers would stop agreeing.

With a slump of relief he watched the last applicant depart. It was a minute past quitting time and the other interviewers were already hurrying for their hats and wraps. His glance lit on a scrap of pencil by the wire basket on his desk. He rolled it toward him with one finger. It was fiercely chewed, making him think of nails bitten to the quick. He recognized it as Jane's. He rolled it back and forth.

He stood up. The office had emptied itself while he'd been sitting there. The cleaning woman, dry mop over her shoulder, was pushing in a cart for the wastepaper. She ignored him. He grabbed his hat and walked out past her, tramped down the stairs.

Outside the day had stayed sparklingly fair, so that the streets were flooded with a soft white light that imparted a subdued carnival atmosphere to the eager hurry of the rush hour. Carr felt a touch of dancing, adventurous excitement add itself to his tension. Instead of heading over to Michigan Boulevard, he took a more direct route north, crossing the sluggish river by one of the blacker, more nakedly-girdered bridges.

Beyond the river, the street slanted downward into a region of beaneries, secondhand magazine stores, small saloons, drugstores with screaming displays laid out six months ago. This kept up for some eight or ten blocks without much change except an increasing number of cramped nightclubs with tautly smiling photographs of the nearly naked girls who presumably dispensed the "continuous entertainment."

Then in one block, by the stern sorcery of zoning laws, the squalid neighborhood was transformed into a wealthy residential section of heavy-set houses with thickly curtained windows and untrod lawns suggesting the cleared areas around forts.

If memory served him right, Jane's house lay just a block and a left turn ahead. He quickened his step. He rounded the corner.

He came to a high iron fence with

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brick pillars, to a tall iron gate. There was a yellow chalk-mark high on one pillar—a cross with dots between the arms.

He stopped dead, stared, took a backward step.

This couldn't be. He must have made a mistake.

But his memory of the gate—and especially of the chalk-mark—made that impossible.

The sinking sun suddenly sent a spectral yellow afterglow, illuminating everything clearly.

A gravel drive led up to just the sort of big stone mansion he had imagined—t u r r e t e d, slate-roofed, heavy-eaved, in the style of the 1890's.

But the gate and fence were rusty, tall weeds encroached on the drive, lawn and flowerbeds were a wilderness, the upper windows were blank and curtainless, most of them broken, those on the first floor were boarded up, pigeon droppings whitened the somber brown stone, and in the center of the lawn, half hidden by the weeds, was a weather-bleached sign:

FOR SALE

CHAPTER IX

It doesn't do for too many people to come alive, brother. The big engine gets out of whack. And the mean guys don't want any competition. They get busy and rub it out...

CARR PUSHED doubtfully at the iron gate. It opened a couple of feet, then squidged to a stop against gravel still damp from yesterday morning's rain. He stepped inside, frowning. He was bothered by a vague and dreamlike sense of recognition.

Suddenly he recalled the reason for it. He had seen pictures of this place in popular magazines, even read an article about it. It was the old Beddoes house, home of one of Chicago's most fabulous millionaires of the 1890's. John Claire Beddoes had been a pillar of society, but there were many persistent traditions about his secret vices. He was even supposed to have kept a young mistress in this very house for ten years under the eyes of his wife—though by what trickery or concealment, or sheer brazenness, was never explained.

But the house had been empty for the past twenty-five years. The magazine article had been very definite on that point. Its huge size and the fact that it was owned by an eccentric old maid, last of the Beddoes line, who lived on the Italian Riviera, had combined to make its sale impossible.

All this while Carr's feet were carrying him up the drive, which led back of the house, passing under a porte-cochere. He had almost reached it when he noticed the footprints.

They were a woman's, they were quite fresh, and yet they were sunk more deeply than his own. They must have been made since the rain. There were two sets, one leading toward the porte-cochere, the other back from it.

Looking at the black ruined flowerbeds, inhaling their dank odor, Carr was relieved that there were footprints.

He examined them more closely. Those leading toward the port-cochere were deeper and more widely spaced. He remembered that Jane had been almost running.

But the most startling discovery was that the footprints apparently didn't enter the house at all. They clustered confusedly under the port-cochere, then returned toward the gate. Evidently Jane had waited until he was gone, then retraced her steps.

He walked back to the gate. A submerged memory from last night was

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tugging at his mind. He looked along the iron fence. He noticed a scrap of paper lodged in the low back shoots of some leafless shrub.

He remembered something white fluttering from Jane's handbag in the dark, drifting through the fence.

He worked his way to it, pushing between the fence and the shrubbery. Unpruned shoots caught at his coat.

The paper was twice creased and the edges were yellowed and frayed, as if it had been carried around for a long time. It was not rain-marked. Unfolding it, he found the inside filled with a brown-inked script vividly recalling Jane's scribbled warning. Moving toward the center of the lawn to catch the failing light, he read:

Always keep up appearances.
Always be doing something.
Always be first or last.
Always be alone.
Always have a route of escape.
Never hesitate, or you're lost.
Never do anything odd—it wouldn't be noticed.
Never move things—it makes gaps.
Never touch anyone—DANGER! MACHINERY.
Never run—they're faster.
Never look at a stranger—it might be one of them.
Some animals are really alive.

Carr looked over his shoulder at the boarded-up house. A lean bird skimmed behind the roof. Somewhere down the block footsteps were clicking on concrete.

HE CONSIDERED the shape of the paper. It was about that of an envelope and the edges were torn. At first glance the other side seemed blank. Then he saw a faded postmark and address. He struck a match and, holding it close to the paper, made out the name—Jane Gregg; and the city—Chicago; and noticed that the postmark was at least a year old.

The address, lying in a crease, took him longer to decipher.

1924 Mayberry St.

The footsteps were closer. He looked up. Beyond the fence an elderly couple was passing. He guiltily whipped out the match, but they walked by without turning their heads. After a minute he slipped out and walked west.

The streetlights winked on. The leaves near the lights looked an artificial green. He walked faster.

The houses shouldered closer together, grew smaller, crept toward the street. The trees straggled, gave out, the grass sickened. Suddenly the houses coallesced, reached the sidewalk with a rush, shot up in towering brick combers, became the barracks of the middle classes.

His mind kept repeating a name. Jane Gregg. He'd half believed all along she was the girl loony Tom Elvested had talked about—the girl he'd made a date with, through Tom, this very afternoon.

A bent yellow street sign said, "Mayberry." He looked at the spotty gold numerals on the glass door of the first apartment. They were 1954-58. As he went down the street he had the feeling that he was walking back across the years.

The first floor of 1922-24 was lighted on the 24 side, except for a small dark sunporch. Behind one window he saw the edge of a red davenport and the head and shoulder of a gray-haired man in shirt-sleeves reading a newspaper. Inside the low-ceilinged vestibule he turned to the brass letter boxes on the 24 side. The first one read: "Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Gregg." After a moment he pushed the button, waited a moment, pushed it again.

He could hear the bell clearly, but

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there was no response, neither a mumble from the speaking tube, nor a buzz from the lock of the door to the stairs.

Yet the Gregg apartment ought to be the one in which he had seen the old man sitting.

Beyond the inner door, in the darkness of the stair well, he thought he saw something move. He couldn't tell what it was. When he stepped closer and peered in, he saw nothing.

He went outside. He craned his neck. The old man was still sitting there. An old man—perhaps deaf?

Then, as Carr watched, the old man put down his paper, settled back, looked across the room, and from the window came the opening triplets of the first movement of the Moonlight Sonata.

Carr felt the wire that fenced the tiny, nearly grassless plot press his calf, and realized that he had taken a backward step. He reminded himself that he'd heard Jane play only the third movement. He couldn't know she'd play the first just this way.

He went back into the vestibule, again pushed the button, heard the bell. The piano notes did not falter.

He peered once more through the inner door. A little light trickled down from the second landing above. He tried the door. Someone must have left it off the buzzer, for it opened.

He hurried past the blackness of the bottom of the stair well. Five steps, a turn, five steps more. Then, just as he reached the first landing, he felt something small and silent come brushing up against his ankle from behind.

THE NEXT moment his back and hands were pressed to the plaster wall across the landing, where it was recessed about a foot.

Then he relaxed. Just a cat. A black cat. A black cat with a white throat and chest, like evening clothes.

And a very cool cat too, for his jump hadn't even fazed it. It walked suavely toward the door of the Gregg apartment.

But about two feet away it stopped. For several seconds it stood there, head upraised, making no movement except that its fur seemed to thicken a trifle. Then, very slowly, it looked around.

It stared at Carr.

Beyond the door, the piano started the sprightly second movement.

Carr edged out his hand. His throat felt dry and constricted. "Kitty," he croaked.

The cat arched its back, spat, made a twisting leap that carried it halfway up the next semi-flight of stairs. It crouched on the top step, its bugged green eyes peering down.

One of the notes came back to Carr's mind: "Some animals are really alive."

There were footsteps. Carr shrank back into the recess. The door opened, the music suddenly swelled, and a gray-haired lady in a blue and white dress looked out and called, "Gigolo! Here, Gigolo!"

She had Jane's small chin and short straight nose, behind veils of plumpness. She was rather dumpy. Her face had a foolish look.

And she must be short-sighted, for although she looked up the stairs, she didn't see the cat, nor did she notice Carr. Feeling uncomfortably like a prowler, he started to step forward, then realized that she was so close he would give her a fright.

"Gigolo!" she called again. Then, to herself, "That cat!" A glance toward the dead bulb in the ceiling and a distracted headshake. "Gigolo!"

She backed inside. "I'm leaving it open, Gigolo," she called. "Come in when you want to."

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Carr stepped out of the recess with a husky, "Excuse me," but the opening notes of the fast third movement drowned him out.

He crossed to the door. The green eyes at the top of the stairs followed him. He raised his hand to knock. But at the same time he looked through the half-open door, across a tiny hall, into the living room.

It was small, with too much heavy furniture and too many lace runners and antimacassars. He could see the other end of the red davenport and the slippered feet of the old man sitting in it. The woman had returned to the straight-backed chair across the room and was sitting with her hands folded, her lips worriedly pursed.

Between them was the piano, an upright.

There was no one sitting at it.

To Carr, the rest of the room seemed to darken and curdle as he stared at the rippling keys.

Then he puffed out his breath. Of course, it must be some kind of electric player.

Again he started to knock, hesitated because they were listening to the music.

The woman moved uneasily on her chair. Her lips anxiously puckered and relaxed, like those of a fish behind aquarium glass. Finally she said, "Aren't you tiring yourself, dear? You've been at it for hours."

Carr looked toward the man, but he could still see only the slippered feet. There was no reply.

The piano stopped. Carr took a step forward. But just then the woman got up. He expected her to do something to the mechanism, but instead she began to stroke the air a couple of feet above the piano bench.

Carr felt himself shivering.

"There, there, dear," she said, "that was very pretty, I know, but you're really spending too much time on your music. At your age a girl ought to be with other young people." She bent her head as if she were looking around the shoulder of someone seated at the piano, wagged her finger, and said, "Look at the circles under those eyes."

FOR CARR, time stopped, as if a clockworks universe hesitated before the next tick. In that frozen pause only his thoughts moved. It was true, then. Tom Elvested... The dumpy man... The room clerk... The Negress... Marcia in her bedroom... Last night with Jane—the bar, the music shop, the movie house, the chess players... The horizontal mannequin... The tobacconist... And now this old woman... All, all automatons, machines!

Or else (time moved again) this old woman was crazy.

Yes, that was it. Crazy. Behaving in her insanity as if her absent daughter were actually there. Believing it.

He clung to that thought.

"Really, Jane," the old woman was saying vapidly, "you must rest."

The slippered feet protruding from the davenport twisted. A weary voice said, "Now don't worry yourself over Jane, Mother."

The woman straightened. "Too much practicing is bad for anyone. It's undermining her health."

The davenport creaked. The man came into sight, not quite as old as Carr had guessed, but tired-looking. "Now, Mother, don't get excited," he said soothingly. "Everything's all right."

The father insane too, Carr thought. No, humoring her. Pretending to believe her hallucinations. That must be it.

"Everything isn't all right," she contradicted tearfully. "I won't have Jane practicing so much and taking

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those wild long walks by herself. Jane, you mustn't—" Suddenly a look of fear came over her. "Oh don't go. Please don't go, Jane." She stretched out her hand toward the hall as if to restrain someone. Carr shrank back. He felt sick. It was horrible that this mad old woman should resemble Jane.

She dropped her hand. "She's gone," she said and began to sob.

The old man put his arm around her shoulders. "You've scared her off," he said softly. "But don't cry, Mother. Tell you what, let's go sit in the dark for a while. It'll rest you." He urged her toward the sunporch. "Jane'll be back in a moment, I'm sure."

Just then, behind Carr, the cat hissed and retreated a few steps higher, the vestibule door downstairs was banged open, there were loud footsteps and voices raised in argument.

"I tell you, Hackman, I don't like

The keys of the piano rippled under the steady playing of a pair of ghostly hands...

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it that Dris excused himself tonight."

"Show some sense, Wilson! This afternoon you didn't want him to come here at all."

"Not by himself, no. With us would be different."

"Pft! Do you always have to have the two of us in the audience when you chase girls?"

The first voice was cool and jolly, the second brassy. They were those Carr had overheard in the cigarette shop.

Before he had time to weigh his fears or form a plan, Carr had slipped through the door in front of him—Jane's parents were out of sight—, tiptoed down the hallway leading to the back of the apartment, turned into the first room he came to, and was standing with his cheek to the wall, squinting back the way he had come.

He couldn't quite see the front door. But in a little while long shadows darkened the calcimine of the hallway.

"I came to check on her first, to chase her second," he heard Wilson say. "She doesn't seem to be around."

"But we just heard the piano and we know she's a music student."

"Use your head, Hackman! You know the piano would play whether she was here or not. If it plays when she's not here, that's the sort of proof we're looking for."

Carr waited for the footsteps or voices of Jane's parents. Surely they must be aware of the intruders. The sunporch wasn't that isolated.

Perhaps they were as terrified as he.

"She's probably wandered off to the back of the flat," Hackman suggested.

"Or hiding there," Wilson amended. "And there may be photographs. Let's look."

CARR WAS already retreating noiselessly across the fussy, old-fashioned bedroom toward where light poured into it from a white-tiled bathroom a short distance away.

"Stop! Listen!" Wilson called. "The sunporch!"

Footsteps receded down the hall, crossed the living room.

"It's the parents," he heard Hackman say in the distance. "I don't see the girl."

"Yet—listen to that!—they're talking as if she might be here."

The footsteps and voices started to come back.

"I told you I didn't like it when Dris bowed out, Hackman. This makes me more suspicious." For once the jolliness was absent from Wilson's voice. "I wouldn't be surprised if he's got in ahead of me and taken the girl somewhere."

"Dris wouldn't dare do a thing like that!"

"No?" The jolliness came back into Wilson's voice, nastily. "Well, if he's not with her, he's fooling around with dead girls, you can bet."

"That's a dirty lie!" Hackman snarled. "Dris might fool around with dead girls when we're all having fun together. Naturally. But not by himself, not alone!"

"You think you're the whole show with him?"

"Yes! You're just jealous because I dropped you."

"Ha! I don't care what Dris—or you—do in your private lives. But if he's taking chances to cheat with this girl, when he knows that the four men in black hats are hunting for us, he's endangering us all. And if that's the case I'll erase him so fast that—*What's that?*"

Carr stiffened. Looking down he saw that he had knocked over a stupid little porcelain pekinese doorstop. He started for the bathroom door, but he had hardly taken the first painfully cautious step when he heard, from that direction, the faint sound of movement. He froze, then turned toward the hall-

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way. He heard the stamp of high heels, a throaty exclamation of surprise from Wilson, a softly pattering rush, the paralyzing fighting-squall of a cat, a smash as if a cane or umbrella had been brought down on a table, and Wilson's, "Damn!"

Next Carr caught a glimpse of Hackman. She had on a pearl gray evening dress, off the shoulders, and a mink wrap over her arm. She was coming down the hall, but she didn't see him.

At the same moment the cat Gigolo landed in the faultless hair, claws raking. Hackman screamed.

The ensuing battle was too quick for Carr to follow it clearly. Most of it was out of his sight, except for the shadows. Twice more the cane or umbrella smashed down, Wilson and Hackman yelled at each other, the cat squalled. Then Wilson shouted, "The door!" There was a final whanging blow, followed by, "Damn!"

FOR THE next few moments, only heavy breathing from the hallway, then Hackman's voice, rising to a vindictive wail, "Bitch! Look what it did to my cheek. Oh, why must there be cats!"

Then Wilson, grimly businesslike: "It's trapped on the stairs. We can get it."

Hackman: "This wouldn't have happened if we'd brought the hound."

Wilson: "The hound! This afternoon you thought differently. Do you remember what happened the first time you brought the hound here? And do you remember what happened to Dris?"

Hackman: "It was his own fault that he got his hand snapped off. He shouldn't have teased it. Besides, the hound likes me."

Wilson: "Yes, I've seen him look at you and lick his chops. We're wasting time, Hackman. You'll have a lot more than a scratched cheek—or a snapped-off hand—to snivel about if we don't clear up this mess right away. Come on. To begin with, we've got to kill that cat."

Carr heard footsteps, then the sound of Wilson's voice growing fainter as he ascended the stairs, calling wheedlingly, "Here, kitty," and a few moments later Hackman's joined in with a sugariness that made Carr shake: "Here, kitty, kitty."

Carr tiptoed across the room and peered through the bathroom door. The white-tiled cubicle was empty, but beyond it he could see another bedroom that was smaller but friendlier. There was a littered dressing table with lamps whose little pink shades were awry. Beside that was a small bookcase overflowing with sheet music piled helter-skelter.

His heart began to pound as he crossed the bathroom's white tiles.

But there was something strange about the bedroom he was approaching. Despite the lively adolescent disorder, there was a museum feel to it, like some historic room kept just as its illustrious occupant had left it. The novel open face down on the dressing table was last year's best-seller.

He poked his head through the door. Something moved beside him and he quickly turned his head.

He had only a moment to look before the blackjack struck. But in that instant, before the cap of pain was pulled down over his eyes and ears, blacking out everything, he recognized his assailant.

The cords in the neck stood out, the cheeks were drawn back, exposing the big front teeth like those of a rat. Indeed the whole aspect—watery magnified eyes, low forehead, taut and spindle-limbed figure—was that of a cornered rat.

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It was the small dark man with glasses.

CHAPTER X

I've told you to forget the secret, but I've got to admit that's a hard thing to do. Once a mind wakes up, it's got an itch to know the whole truth . . .

A BLACK sea was churning in front of Carr, but he couldn't look out into it because there was a row of lights just a little way beyond his feet, so bright that they made his head ache violently. He danced about in pain, flapping his arms. It seemed a degrading thing to be doing, even if he were in pain, so he tried to stop, but he couldn't.

Eventually his agonized prancing turned him around and he saw behind him a forest of dark shabby trees and between them glimpses of an unconvincing dingy gray sky. Then he whirled a little way farther and saw that Jane was beside him, dancing as madly as he. She still wore her sweater, but her skirt had become short and tight, like a flapper's, and there were bright pats of rouge on her cheeks. She looked floppy as a French doll.

The pain in his head lessened and he made a violent effort to stop his frantic dancing so he could go over and stop hers, but it was no use. Then for the first time he noticed thin black cords going up from his wrists and knees. He rolled his eyes and saw that there were others going up from his shoulders and head and the small of his back. He followed them up with his eyes and saw that they were attached to a huge wooden cross way up. A giant hand gripped the cross, making it waggle. Above it, filling the roof of the sky, was the ruddy face of Wilson.

Carr looked down quickly. He was thankful the footlights were so bright that he couldn't see anything of the silent audience.

Then a thin, high screaming started and the cords stopped tugging at him, so that at least he didn't have to dance. A steady pull on his ear turned his head slowly around, so that he was looking into the forest. The same thing was happening to Jane. The screaming grew and there bounded fantastically from the forest, the cords jerking him higher than his head, the puppet of the small dark man with glasses. His face was carved in an expression of rat-like fear. He fell in a disjointed heap at Carr's feet and pawed at Carr with his stiff hands. He kept gibbering something Carr couldn't understand. Every once in a while he would turn and point the way he had come and gibber the louder and scrabble the more frantically at Carr's chest.

Finally his backward looks became a comically terrified head-wagging and he resumed his flight, bounding off the stage in a single leap.

Carr and Jane continued to stare at the forest.

Then she said, in a high squeaking voice, "Oh save me!" and came tripping over to him and flung her corded arms loosely around his neck and he felt his jaw move on a string through his head and heard a falsetto voice that came from above reply, "I will, my princess."

Then he pawed around on the ground as if he were hunting for something and she clung to him in a silly way, impeding his efforts. Finally a cord that went up his sleeve pulled a little sword into his hand. Then he saw something coming out of the forest, something that wasn't nice.

It was a very large hound, colored a little darker slate gray than the sky, with red eyes and a huge tusky jaw.

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But what was nasty about it as it came nosing through the trees was that, although there were cords attached to it at the proper points, they were all slack. It reached the edge of the forest and lifted its head and fixed its red eyes on them.

There followed a ridiculous battle in which the hound pretended to attack Carr and Jane, and he flailed about him with his sword. At one point the hound grabbed Jane's arm in its teeth and he poked at it, but it was all make-believe. Then he made a wilder lunge and the hound turned over on its back and pretended to die, but all the while its red eyes looked at him knowingly.

THEN, AS he and Jane embraced woodenly, the curtain swished down without the least applause from the silent audience, and he and Jane were twitched high into the air. A hand with red-lacquered nails as big as coal-shovels grabbed him and Hackman peered at him so closely that the pores of her skin were like smallpox pits.

"This little one looks as if it might be coming alive," she rumbled. The nails pinched his arm so cruelly that it was all he could do not to cry out.

"You're imagining things," came Wilson's voice like distant thunder. "Just like those black hats you thought you saw in the audience. What bothers me is that I can't find the little sword."

"Never mind," Hackman replied, and her breath was like a wind from rotting flowerbeds. "Dris will check on it."

"Dris!" Wilson boomed contemptuously. "Come on, put the puppet away."

"Very well," Hackman said, hanging Carr by his cords to a high hook. "But listen to me, little one," and she shook Carr until his teeth rattled. "If you ever come alive, I will give you to the hound!" She let him go. He swung and hit the wall so hard it knocked the breath out of him and he had to fight not to writhe.

With earthquake treadings and creakings, Wilson and Hackman went away. Carr looked cautiously to either side. To his left, a wooden shelf projected from the wall at about the level of his head. To his right Jane hung. Other dangling puppets were dark blobs beyond her.

Then Carr withdrew from his jacket the sword he had hidden there just before the curtain came down, and with it he cut the black cords attached to his knees, then all the others but those fixed to his wrists. He saw that Jane was watching him.

He tucked his sword in his belt and, gripping his wrist cords, pumped with his arms so that he was swinging back and forth along the wall. Soon the swings became so long that his feet were just missing the edge of the wooden shelf, and he was soaring well above it. On the next swing he managed to catch hold of one of Jane's cords. It burned his hand as they careened wildly, but he held on until they came to rest.

Then came ticklish work. Supporting himself on Jane's cords, he cut his own last two, keeping hold of one of them and making a little loop at the bottom. Setting his foot in this stirrup, he took Jane around the waist. He hooked his other arm around the stirrip-string, drew his sword with that arm, and cut all of Jane's cords. As the last one parted, he felt she was no longer a limp puppet slung over his arm, but a tiny living woman.

Next moment they were swinging through space. He let the sword fall and clung to the string with that hand. And now he realized that the shortened

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string was carrying them too high. He let go his hand, kicking loose with his foot, and dropped with Jane. They landed on the edge of the shelf with a breath-taking jar, just managed to wriggle to safety with stomach and knee.

Then they were running along the shelf. From that they dropped to the top of a book case, to a table, to a chair and so to the floor. Ahead of them was a huge door, slightly ajar. Carr knew it led to safety.

But at that moment there began a high thin screaming. Looking back, Carr saw that it came from the puppet of the small dark man with glasses, who had been hanging beyond Jane.

"You wouldn't take me," he screamed.

And now other sounds could be heard—giant footsteps.

GRABBING Jane's wrist, Carr sprinted toward the door, but to his dismay he found that his legs were becoming wobbly. He prayed for strings to make them move. Furthermore, the floor was acquiring an oddly yielding texture. It was as if he and Jane, rubber-jointed, were trying to run through piled hay.

The screaming became earsplitting.

Throwing a quick glance over his shoulder, Carr saw the angry faces of Wilson and Hackman careening toward him like huge red balloons.

But much nearer, in fact just at his heels, bounded the hound. Tucked back between its slavering jaws was a bitten-off hand.

Carr made one last effort to increase his speed. He sprawled headlong on the billowy floor.

He felt stiff paws on his back, pinning him down. He squirmed around and grappled feebly. The screaming continued.

But then the hound seemed to collapse, to crumple under his fingers. Hitching himself up, he realized that he was in his own room, in his own bed, fighting the bedclothes, and that the screaming in his ears was the siren of a passing fire engine.

He shakily thrust his feet out of bed and sat on the edge of it, waiting for the echoes of his nightmare to stop swirling through his senses.

His head ached miserably. Lifting his hand, he felt a large sensitive lump. He recalled the small dark man hitting him, though the memory was still mixed up with the dream-betrayal.

Pale light was sifting through the window. He went over to the bureau, opened the top drawer. He looked at the three pint bottles of whisky. He chose the quarter full one, poured himself a drink, downed it, poured himself another, looked around.

The clothes he had been wearing were uncharacteristically laid out on a chair.

His head began to feel less like a whirlpool. He went over and looked out the window. The pale light was not that of dawn, but gathering evening. Unwillingly he decided that he had been unconscious not only last night, but also all of today.

A coolness on his fingers told him that whisky was dribbling out of the shot glass. He drank it and turned around. A gust of anger at the small dark man (may be your friend!) went through him.

Just then he noticed a blank envelope propped on the mantlepiece. He took it down, snapped on a light, opened it, unfolded the closely scribbled note it contained. It was from Jane.

You're in danger, Carr, terrible danger. Don't stir out of your room today. Stay away from the window.

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Don't answer if anyone knocks.

I'm terribly sorry about last night. My friend is sorry too, now that he knows who you are. He thought you were with Wilson and Hackman, so his attack on you was excusable. We would stay with you longer, but our mere presence would mean too much danger for you. My friend says you'll come out of it okay.

I'm sorry that I can't explain things more. But it's better for you not to know too much.

Don't try to find me, Carr. It isn't only that you'd risk your own life. You'd endanger mine. My friend and I are up against an organization that can't be beaten, only hidden from. If you try to find me, you'll only spoil my chances.

You want a long happy life, don't you?—not just a few wretched months or hours before you're hunted down. Then your only chance is to do what I tell you.

Stay in your room all day. Then arrange your things just as you usually do before going to work in the morning. Set your alarm for the usual time. You must be very exact—a lot depends on it. Above all, burn this letter—on your honor do that. Then dissolve in a glass of water the powders you'll find on the table beside your bed, and drink it. In a little while you'll go to sleep and when you wake up, everything will be all right.

You may not believe me, but what reason would I have to lie? Honestly, Carr, your only chance to get clear of the danger you're in, and to help me, is to do exactly what I've told you. And forget me forever.

CARR WALKED over to the bed. On the little table, leaning against an empty tumbler, were two slim paper packets. He felt one between finger and thumb. It gritted.

He glanced again at the letter. His head had begun to ache stabbingly. Phrases that were anger-igniting sparks jumped at him: "...is sorry too... excusable..." What sort of a nincompoop did they think he was. Next she'd be saying, "So sorry we had to poison you." She was a nice girl, all right—of the sort who throws her arms around you so her boyfriend can stick a gun in your ribs.

He'd blundered into a nasty affair, and maybe he'd picked the wrong side.

And she did have a reason to lie. She might want to scare him off, keep him from discovering what she and her precious friend were up to, maybe gain time for some sort of getaway.

He hurried into his clothes, wincing at the jabs of pain. After pulling on his topcoat, he drained the last shot from the whisky bottle, tossed it back in the drawer, looked at the full bottles a moment, stuck one in his pocket, and went out, glaring savagely at the mirror-imprisoned Carr on the stairs.

He walked a block to the nearest hotel and waited for a cab. Two cruised by with their flags up, but the drivers ignored his arm-wavings and calls. He ground his teeth. Then one drew in to the curb, but just as he was getting ready to board it, two cold-eyed show-girls from the hotel swept by him and piled in. He swore out loud, turned on his heel and started walking.

It was a nice evening and he detested it. He felt a senseless rage at the people he passed. How nice it would be to smash all the neon signs, rip down the posters, break into the houses and toss out of the windows the crooning, moaning, brightly-blatting radios. Come the atom bomb!

But for all that, the fresh air was helping his head. As he neared May-

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berry street he began to calm down, or at least focus his anger.

Halfway down the last block a car was parked with its motor softly chugging—a roadster with its top down. Just as he passed it, Carr saw a heavily-built man come out of the entry to the Gregg apartment. He strolled off in the opposite direction, but Carr had already recognized him. It was Wilson.

Repressing the fear that surged through him, Carr made a snap decision and hurried after him.

But just then a voice behind him said, "If you value your life or your reason, keep away from that man." At the same time a hand gripped his elbow and spun him around.

This time the small dark man with glasses was wearing a black snap-brim hat and a tightly buttoned trench coat. And this time he didn't look terrified. Instead he was sardonically smiling. He rocked back and forth on his heels.

"I knew you wouldn't stay in your room," he said. "I told Jane her letter would have just the opposite effect."

Carr doubled his fist, swung back his arm, hesitated. Damn it, he *did* wear glasses—pitifully thick-lensed ones.

"Go ahead," said the small dark man, "make a scene. Bring them down on us. I don't care."

Carr stared at the glasses bright with reflected street light. He caught a whiff of liquor.

"You wouldn't think, would you," the small dark man mused, "that as we stand here, conversing idly, we are both in deadly peril." He smiled. "No, I'm sure you wouldn't think that. And as for me, I'm not afraid of anything."

"Listen," Carr said, advancing with balled fist, "you slugged me last night. I didn't like that."

"So I did," said the small dark man, again rocking on his heels.

"Well, in that case—" Carr began, and then remembered Wilson. He whirled around. The portly man was nowhere in sight. He took a few steps, then looked back. The small dark man was walking rapidly toward the purring roadster. Carr darted after him and sprang to the running board just as the other slipped behind the wheel.

"You wanted to distract me until he was gone," Carr accused. "You didn't want me to talk to him."

"That's right," the small dark man said carelessly. "Jump in."

Angrily Carr complied, as the small dark man pushed down on the clutch, shifted into first and, stretched out in that position, put his face close to Carr's and began to talk. His words rode on a wind of whisky, but the voice was bitter and confessional.

"In the first place," he said, "I hate you—otherwise I'd be doing my best to get you out of this instead of leading you straight toward the center. I don't care what happens to you and tonight I don't give a damn what happens to me. But I still have a certain quixotic concern for Jane's feelings—her li'l romantic dreams. It's for her sake that I'm going to do what I'm going to do."

"And what are you going to do?" snapped Carr.

The roadster bucked, leaped forward with a roar.

CHAPTER XI

When you know the world's a big engine, it may go to your head. You'll think you can take crazy chances. But the big engine can chew you up just as quick as an ordinary engine chews up a

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smart-alecky factory hand...

CARR'S gaze swung up as the grimy red wall of a truck loomed higher, higher. "World Movers," the sign said. He closed his eyes. He felt blood-checking swerve and a chalk-on-slate caress along their fender. When he opened his eyes again, it was to see a woman and child flash by not a foot from the running board. He lurched sideways as they screamed around a corner, let go his hat to cling to the car, watched a coupe and streetcar converge ahead of them, closed his eyes again as they grazed through the gap.

"Stop, you idiot!" he commanded. "You're drunk!"

The small dark man leered at him. "That's right," he said triumphantly and turned back to the wheel just in time to miss taking the side off a parked sedan.

To either side small indistinguishable stores and dusty white street globes shot by, while blocks of brick and gleaming streetcar tracks vanished under the hood.

"Tell me what it's all about before you kill us," Carr yelled.

The small man snickered through his teeth. His hat blew off. Watching it go, Carr demanded, "Are you one of the men with black hats?"

The roadster went into a screaming skid. Carr cringed as a hot-dog vender's white stand ballooned in size. But the small dark man managed to straighten the roadster out in time, though Carr got a whiff of hot dogs.

"Don't ask questions like that," the small dark man warned. I'm not brave." Then he goggled at Carr, drove with his left hand for a moment while he tapped his bare head with his right, and said wisely, "Protective coloration."

Ahead cars skittered to the curb like disturbed ants. Over the motor's roar Carr became aware of a wailing that grew in volume. A wild white light mixed with red began to flood the street from behind them, its beam swinging back and forth like a giant pendulum. Then from the corner of his eye Carr noticed a seated man in a big black slicker heave into view several feet above him, creep abreast. Below the man was a bright vermilion hood. Behind him were dim ladders and coils, other slickered figures.

Ahead the street took a jog. It was impossible for both the roadster and the fire engine to get through.

Grinning, the small dark man nursed the throttle. The fire engine dropped back just enough for them to careen through the gap ahead of it, under a maze of trolley wires, while frozen pedestrians gaped.

Carr's fear left him. There was no use to it.

The street narrowed, its sides grew dark. Behind them the fire engine braked, took a turn.

"You're mixed up with Wilson and Hackman and Dris, aren't you?" Carr asserted.

This time the roadster swerved to the left, and for a few moments roared along only inches from the curb, kicking up mud.

"Nor that brave," the small dark man told him reprovingly as the roadster came back into the middle.

Carr caught a cold whiff of water and oil. Skyscrapers twinkled against the sky ahead, but just this side of them a gap in the buildings was widening and a black skeletal structure loomed.

A rapid clanging started. Towers flanking the black structure began to blink red. Carr grabbed for the wheel, stamped at the brake. "They're opening the bridge!" he yelled.

The small man kicked him in the

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ankle, clubbed his hands aside, and accelerated. Ahead were stopped autos and a black and white barrier. Swinging far to the left, they struck its flexible end. It rasped along the roadster's side, tore free with a great twang. They shot forward onto the dark span. To either side solidity dropped away. Far below, yellow windows of skyscrapers flowed in uneven patterns on the water.

THEY WERE three-quarters of the way across when, through their hurtling speed, Carr felt the feather touch of a titan. Under them the span had begun to rise. Ahead of them a thread of blackness appeared at the break in the jacknife of the span.

The small dark man clamped the throttle to the floor. There was a spine-compressing jar and jounce, the skyscrapers reeled, then another jar as the roadster came down—on its wheels. The tip of the second barrier broke off with a giant snap.

The open bridge had cleared the street ahead of traffic going their way. The small dark man breezed along it for four blocks like the winner of a race, then suddenly braked and skidded around the corner and across to the wrong side of the street. The two wheels on his side hit the curb and the roadster rocked to a stop.

Carr loosened his death-grip on dashboard and door handle, balled a fist and turned, this time without any compunction about glasses.

But the small dark man had vaulted out of the roadster and was lightly running up the steps of a building that Carr now realized was the public library. As he hit the sidewalk in pursuit, he saw the small dark man briefly silhouetted against the yellow rectangle of a swinging door. When Carr stiff-armed through it, the man was vanishing at the top of a flight of marble stairs.

Reaching the top, Carr felt a spurt of savage pleasure. He was gaining. Before him was a large, domed room, open shelves to one side, counters and booths to the other, unoccupied except for a couple of girls behind a window and a baldheaded man burdened with a stack of books and a briefcase.

The small dark man, with Carr almost at his heels, was racing toward a wall decorated with twinkling gold mosaic. He ducked down a narrow corridor and to his shock Carr realized they were both running on glass.

For a moment Carr thought that the small dark man had led him this long chase solely to get him to step through a skylight. Then he realized that he was on one of the many translucent cat-walks that served as aisles in the stacks of the library. He sprinted forward again, guided by the sonorous pit-pat of receding footsteps.

He found himself in a silent world within a world. A world several stories high and covering a good part of a block. An oddly insubstantial world of metal beams, narrow stairs, translucent runways, and innumerable books.

Like some animal that had reached its native element, the small dark man now held his lead, craftily doubling and redoubling on his course. Carr caught glimpses of a cream-colored raincoat, he shook his fist at teeth and a grin spied through gaps in successive tiers of books, he clutched futilely at a small, expensive-looking shoe disappearing up a metal-treaded stair in a tantalizingly leisurely way.

He was panting and his side had begun to hurt, something in his topcoat was growing heavier. It began to seem to him that the chase would never end, that the two of them would

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go skipping and staggering on indefinitely, always the same distance apart.

The whole experience had acquired nightmarish overtones. It pleased Carr to remember that the Dewey Decimal System of book classification has an end. "If I don't catch him in the four hundreds, I'll get him in the fives. If not in the useful arts, then in the fine. He shan't double back to Mysticism and Witchcraft!"

He lurched around a corner and there, not ten feet away, back turned, standing beside an old brass-fitted drinking fountain that gurgled merrily, was his quarry.

CARR HICCUPED a laugh between his gasps for air. This was no sinister metaphysical pursuit after all. It was just a chase in a Chaplin film. They would both refresh themselves at the fountain, commenting on the excellence of the water. Then the small dark man would nod politely and walk off. Carr would realize with whom he'd been drinking, and the whole chase would start over again.

But first, Carr decided, he'd slug the guy.

As he moved forward, however, it was inevitable that he should look at the thing at which the small dark man was looking.

Or rather, at the person.

For just inside the next aisle, gilt-buttoned brown suit almost exactly the same shade as the buckram bindings that made a background, lips formed in an ellipse of dismay that couldn't quite avoid being a smile, was Jane.

Carr drifted past the small dark man as if the latter were part of a dissolving dream. With every step forward the floor seemed to get solider under his feet.

Jane's lips held the same shape, she just tilted her head, as he put his arms around her and kissed her. He felt as if he had grasped the one real figure out of thousands in a room of mirrors.

She pushed away, looking up at him incredulously. His nerves reawoke with a jerk. "Where's he gone?" he asked, looking around him.

"Who?"

"The small dark madman with glasses."

"I don't know," she said. "He has a way of fading."

"I'll say he has!" He turned on her. "Though generally he tries to murder you first." His hands were beginning to tremble from delayed reaction to his ride.

"What?"

"Yes. I thought you said he was timid."

"He is. Terribly."

"Then you should have seen him tonight." And he told her about the ride. "I guess he got his courage out of a bottle," he finished, really shaking now.

"Oh, the coward," she breathed. "Pretending to sacrifice his own feelings, even to the point of bringing you to me—but really just doing it to hurt me, because he knew I wanted to keep you out of this. And then on top of it all, taking chances with your life, hoping that you both would die while he was being noble." Her lips curled.

"All right, all right!" Carr said, "But what's it all about?"

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean. Your friend and Hackman and Wilson and Dris and the four men with black hats and you being Tom Elvested's Jane Gregg, who wasn't there, and Jane Gregg of Mayberry Street."

She backed away from him, shaking her head.

He followed her. His voice was harsh. "Look, Jane," he said, "day be-

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fore yesterday your friend ran away from me. Last night he knocked me out. Tonight he took crazy chances with my life. Why?"

The fear in her eyes brought his exasperation to the boil. "What have you and he done? Why are the others after you? What's wrong with your father and mother? What are you doing here? You've got to tell me!"

He had her backed against the shelves and was shouting in her face. But she would only goggle up at him and shake her head. His control snapped. He grabbed her by the shoulders and shook her hard.

BUT NO MATTER how violently her head snapped back and forth, her lips stayed pressed tightly together. He suddenly loosed her and turned away, burying his head in his hands, breathing heavily.

When he looked up she was smoothing her suit. She bit her lip when her hand touched her shoulder. "Do I shake well?" she asked.

He winced. "Sorry," he said dully. "But I've just got to know."

"It would be the worst thing that could happen to you," she told him simply.

"I don't care."

"It would be like signing your death warrant."

"I tell you I don't care." He looked at her in a misery of exasperation. "Jane!"

"All right," she said quietly, "I'll tell you everything."

He looked at her incredulously. Then his eyes widened. For the first time he actually realized where he was.

"We've got to get out of here!" he said, jumping away from the shelves against which he'd been leaning.

"Why?" She was as cool as ever.

"We're in the stacks." His voice automatically hushed itself. "No one can come here without a pass. We made enough racket to wake the dead. They're bound to come looking for us."

"Are they?" She smiled. "They haven't yet."

"And then—oh Good Lord—the traffic cops and who knows who else... they're bound to!" He looked down the long aisles apprehensively.

She smiled again. "But they haven't."

Carr turned wondering eyes on her. Something of the charming willfulness of the night before last seemed to have returned to her. He felt an answering spirit rising in himself.

And it did seem the height of silliness to worry about breaking library regulations just after you'd escaped a messy death a dozen times—and were about to hear the most important story in the world.

"All right," he said, "in that case let's have a drink." And he fished out of his pocket the unopened pint of whisky.

"Swell," she said, her eyes brightening. "The fountain's right there. I'll get paper cups."

CHAPTER XII

Of course if there's someone you really love, you've got to tell them the secret. For love means sharing everything, even the horrors...

CARR LOWERED his cup, half emptied.

"Listen," he said, "there's someone coming."

Jane seemed unconcerned. "Just a page."

"How do you know? Besides, he's coming this way."

He hustled Jane to the next aisle,

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where there was less light. The footsteps grew louder, ringing on the glass.

"Let's go farther back," Carr whispered. "He might see us here."

But Jane refused to budge. He peered over her shoulder. "Damn!" he breathed, "I forgot the bottle. He's bound to spot it."

Jane's shoulders twitched.

The he turned out to be a she, Carr saw by patches through the gaps between the shelves. A she with sleek black hair cut in bangs across the forehead, and a tight, dark red dress. She walked past their aisle, stopped at the second one beyond. She looked up.

"Here we are, boys and girls," they heard her say to herself in a loud bitter voice. "Oh, in six volumes, is it? Is that all he expects at closing time?" She scribbled briefly on a slip of paper she was carrying. "Sorry, Baldy, but—out! You'll have to learn about the secrets of sex some other day."

And she returned the way she had come, humming "St. Louis Woman."

Carr recovered the bottle. "Quite a character," he said with a smile. "I'm not sure but what she didn't see us."

Jane gave him a look. Then she went to the next aisle and returned with a couple of stools. Carr pushed his topcoat back over some books. His face grew serious. For a moment they were silent. Then he said, "Well, I'm waiting."

Jane moved nervously. "Let's have another drink."

Carr refilled their cups. Jane just held hers. It was shadowy where they were. She reached up and tugged a cord. Extra light spilled around them. There was another pause. Jane looked at him.

"You must think of my childhood," she began, "as an empty, middle-class upbringing in a city apartment. You must think of me as miserable and lonely, with a few girl-friends whom I thought silly and at the same time more knowing than I. And then my parents—familiar creatures I was terribly tied to, but with whom I had no real contact. They seemed to go unhappily through a daily routine as sterile as death.

"The whole world was an ugly mystery to me. I didn't know what people were after, why they did the things they did, what secret rules they were obeying. I used to take long walks alone in the park, trying to figure it out." She paused. "It was in the park that I first met the small dark man with glasses.

"No," she corrected herself, frowning, "I didn't exactly meet him. I just noticed him watching me. Usually from a distance—from another path, or across the lagoon, or through a crowd of people. He'd watch me and follow me for a way and then drift out of sight and maybe turn up again farther on.

"I pretended not to notice him. I knew that strange men who followed girls were not to be trusted. Though I don't think I was ever frightened of him that way. He looked so small and respectful. Actually I suppose I was beginning to feel romantic about him." She took a swallow of her drink.

Carr had finished his. "Well?"

"OH, HE KEPT coming closer and then one day he spoke to me. 'Would you mind if I walked with you for a while?' he asked. I gulped and managed to say, 'No.' That's all. He just walked beside me. It was days before he even touched my arm. But that didn't matter. It was what he said that was important. He talked hesitatingly, but he knew the thoughts inside me I'd never told anyone—how puzzling life was, how alone you felt, how other people sometimes seemed

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just like animals, how they could hurt you with their eyes. And he knew the little pictures in my mind too—how the piano keys looked like champing teeth, how written words were just meaningless twists of ribbon, how snores sounded like faraway railway trains and railway trains like snores.

"After we'd walked for a while that first day, I saw two of my girl-friends ahead. He said, 'I'll leave you now,' and went off. I was glad, for I wouldn't have known how to introduce him.

"That first walk set a pattern, almost as if we'd learned a list of magic rules. We must always meet as if by accident and part without warning. We must never go any special place. We must never tell our names. We must never talk of tomorrow or plan anything, just yield to a fatalistic enchantment. Of course I never mentioned my friend to a soul. Away from the park I'd say, 'You dreamed him, Jane,' almost believing it. But the next afternoon I'd go back and he'd appear and I'd walk with him and have the feeling of a friend seeing into my mind. It went on that way for quite a while." She emptied her cup.

"And then things changed?" Carr asked as he poured her more.

"In a way."

"Did he start to make love to you?"

"No. Perhaps that was what was wrong. Perhaps if he'd made love to me, everything would have been all right. But he never did any more than take my arm. He was like a man who walks with a gun at his back. I sensed a terrible, mute tension inside him, born of timidity or twisted pride, a seething flood of frustrated energy. Eventually it began to seep over into me. For no good reason my heart would start to pound, I could hardly breathe, and little spasms would race up and down me. And all the while he'd be talking calmly. It was awful. I think I would have done something to break that tension between us, except for the magic rules and the feeling that everything would be spoiled if we once disobeyed them. So I did nothing. And then things began to get much worse."

"How do you mean?" Carr asked.

Jane looked up at him. Now that she was lost in her story, she looked younger than ever.

"We were stuck, that's what it amounted to, and we began to rot. All that knowledge he had of my queer thoughts began to terrify me. Because, you see, I'd always believed that they were just quirks of my mind, and that by sharing them I'd get rid of them. I kept waiting for him to tell me how silly they were. But he never did. Instead, I began to see from the way he talked that my queer thoughts weren't illusions at all, but the truth. Nothing did mean anything. Snores actually were a kind of engine-puffing, and printed words had no more real meaning than wind-tracings in sand. Other people weren't alive, really alive, like you were. You were all alone."

A bell clanged. They both started.

Jane relaxed. "Closing time," she explained.

Carr shrugged. That they were in the stacks of the library had become inconsequential to him. "Go on," he said.

"Now the walks did begin to effect the rest of my life. All day long I'd be plunged in gloom. My father and mother seemed a million miles away, my classes at the music academy the stupidest things in the world. And yet I didn't show anything outwardly. No one noticed any change, except Gigolo my cat, who sometimes acted afraid and spat at me, yet sometimes came

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purring to me in a most affectionate way—and sometimes watched at the windows and doors for hours, as if he were on guard. I was lost and not one soul tried to save me, not even my man in the park."

SHE TOOK a drink and leaned back. "And then one autumn day when the clouds were low and the fallen leaves crackled under our feet, and we'd walked farther together than ever before, in fact a little way out of the park, I happened to look across the street and I noticed a spruce young man looking at us. I called my friend's attention to him. He peered around through his thick glasses.

"The next instant he had grabbed me tight above the elbow and was marching me ahead. He didn't speak until we got around the corner. Then he said, in a voice I'd never heard him use before, 'They have seen us. Get home.'

"I started to ask questions, but he only said, 'Don't talk. Don't look back.' I was frightened and obeyed him.

"In the hours afterwards my fear grew. I pictured 'them' in a hundred horrible ways. I went to sleep praying never to see the small dark man again and just be allowed to live my old stupid life.

"Some time after midnight I awoke with my heart jumping, and there was Gigolo standing on the bedclothes spitting at the window. I made myself get up and tiptoe to it. Two dark things rose above the outside sill. They were the top of a ladder resting against it. I looked down. Light from the alley showed me the smiling face of the young man I'd seen across the street that afternoon. You know him, Carr. The one they call Dris—Driscoll Ames. He had two hands then. He reached them up to open the window.

"I ran to my father's and mother's room. I called to them to wake up. I shook them. And then came the most terrible shock of my life. They wouldn't wake, no matter what I did. Except that they breathed, they might have been dead. I remember pounding my father's chest and digging my nails into his arms.

"I think that even without Gigolo's warning snarl and the sound of footsteps coming swiftly through the bathroom, I would have rushed out of the apartment, rather than stay a moment longer with those two living corpses who had brought me into the world."

Her voice was getting high. Carr looked uneasily down the empty, book-lined aisles.

"I darted down the front stairs and there, peering at our mailbox, I saw an older man. You know him too, Carr. Wilson. He looked at me through the glass panel of the inner door and then he looked at my night-dress, and then he smiled like the young man on the ladder.

"With steps pounding down the stairs there was only one way for me to go. I ran down through the basement, past the stone wash tubs and the padlocked storage rooms, and out into the dirty cement area-way. And there, standing in the alley, in the light of one high naked bulb, I saw my fairy godmother."

CARR BLINKED. She smiled thinly and said, "Oh yes, my fairy godmother, just like Cinderella's, come to rescue me. A tall beautiful golden-haired woman in a golden evening dress. There was a black band around her wrist, like the strap of a handbag.

"Then I saw that the black band was a leash, and at the other end of the leash was a huge hound that stood high as her waist and was dirty gray

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like the fence behind them. It was snuffing at the rubbish.

"Then Hackman—for of course it was she—saw me crouching under the back porches and her lips formed in a smile, but it was different from the men's smiles, because it was at the thought that the hound would get me before the men.

"Just at that moment Gigolo shot past my legs with a squalling cry and hurtled off down the alley. With a great bound the hound was after him, dragging my fairy godmother after him stumbling and slipping, ignoring her curses and frantic commands, dirtying her lovely golden gown. And I was racing off in the opposite direction, the hound's baying filling my ears.

"I ran for blocks, turning corners, cutting across lawns, before I stopped —and then only because I couldn't run any farther. But it was enough. I seemed to have got away.

"But what was I to do? I was cold. The windows peered. The street lights whispered. The shadows pawed. There was always someone crossing a corner two blocks away. I thought of a girlfriend who was at least a little closer to me than the others, a girl named Midge who was studying at the music academy.

"She lived in a duplex just a few blocks away. Keeping out of the light as much as I could, I hurried over to it. Her bedroom window was open a little. I threw some pebbles at it, but nothing happened. I didn't like to ring. Finally I managed to step from the porch to her window and crawl inside. She was asleep, breathing easily.

"By this time I was telling myself that my father and mother had been drugged as part of a plan to kidnap me. But not for long.

"For, you see, I was no more able to rouse Midge than my parents.

"I dressed in some of her clothes and climbed out the window and walked the streets until morning. Then I tried to go home, but I went cautiously, spying out the way, and that was lucky, for in a parked automobile across from our apartment sat Wilson. I went to the academy and saw Hackman standing at the head of the steps. I went to the park and there, where my small dark man used to wait for me, was Dris.

"And then I knew for sure."

"Knew what?" Carr asked after a pause.

She looked at him. "You know," she said. "You told me yourself in front of the Art Institute."

"What?" Carr repeated uneasily.

Her face seemed incredibly tiny as she sat hunched on her stool, her brown suit shading into the background. The stacks were silent, the mutter of the city was inaudible, a scampering mouse at the other end of the building might have been heard. In all directions the narrowing aisles stretched off. All around them was the pressure of the hundreds of thousands of books. But always the tunneling gaps, the peepholes, the gaps between the books.

And then, one by one, moving in on them, the lights in the stacks began to wink out.

"Just that everything's dead," Jane whispered. "Just that people are corpses. You don't have to have the psychologists tell you that consciousness is unnecessary. You don't have to listen to the scientists who say that everything's atoms. All you have to do is read the schoolbooks, the schoolbooks written by dead minds the same way a newspaper is printed by dead metal. They all tell you the same thing—that the universe is just a big machine."

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The light glowed above them like an all-seeing eye as they sat and toasted each other...

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CHAPTER XIII

If you can't get back to your place in the machine, your chances are slim, brother. By being smart and never making a mistake, you may be able to stay alive. But it's lonely work, even if you've got a buddy...

"NO," CARR breathed.

All the lights had gone out except the one above their heads, which seemed to glow like some limpid eye.

Jane smiled at him crookedly. "But you told me that yourself," she repeated, "not knowing half of what you know now. Just a big machine, that's all it is. Except every now and then a mind awakens, or is awakened by another mind. One in a million. If the wakened mind keeps to its place in the machine, it may be safe. But if it leaves its place, God help it!"

"Why?" Carr asked unwillingly.

"Because the pattern won't change for it—and the minds that have wakened first will hunt it down and destroy it. Or else they'll corrupt it."

"Why should that be?" Carr demanded. "Why wouldn't the wakened minds want to waken other minds, more and more of them, until the whole machine's awake?"

Jane's lips shaped themselves in a sneer. "Because that isn't the way wakened minds operate—and besides, they can't waken other minds, except in a few lucky cases by a tremendous and uncontrollable effort of will. But they don't want to waken other minds, except to torture them. They're selfish and frightened and mad with desire. They glory in being able to do whatever they want, no matter how cruel or obscene, in a dead world that can't stop them." (There sprang into Carr's mind the memory of the four men with black hats and the dead-alive mannequin.) "They're deathly afraid of rivals stealing their privileged position—and every wakened mind is a rival, to be corrupted and joined with them in their selfishness, or else destroyed. All they can see is the prey and the loot."

"No," Carr breathed; "I can't believe it."

"Can't believe it!" Again Jane smiled crookedly. "If you'd seen and known what I've seen and known this past year—"

"Year?" Carr said incredulously.

"Yes, it's that long since I ran away from my fairy godmother. Give me another drink. No, more. And take some yourself. Yes, a whole year."

She drank greedily and looked at him for a while. "Do you know Chicago, Carr? I do. I know it like a big museum, with all sorts of interesting dead things in the showcases and the animated exhibits. At times it's almost restful. And at times it's almost beautiful, like an elaborate automaton set before a European king. Only every once in a great while you see someone else in the museum, perhaps at the end of a long corridor. You might call them the museum guards, for they don't want you to be there. And you can't go home from the museum, you have to live there forever. Is there anything left in the bottle?"

"A little," he said. "No, enough for two."

"I've lived a year in the museum," she continued, receiving the paper cup from him. "I've slept in parks, in empty furnished flats, in department store display rooms, in that boarded-up old Beddoes mansion, on leather couches in clubs and waiting rooms that are closed at night, on stolen campbeds in offices and warehouses—but not in empty hotel rooms, for you can't tell when they'll be occupied. I've stolen food from delicatessens, snatched it from the plates of people

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who couldn't see me or anything, gone straight into the kitchens of the most expensive restaurants—and hooked candy bars from drugstore stands. Shall I tell you about the blind crowds I've threaded through, the unseeing trucks I've dodged, the time I got blood-poisoning and cured it myself behind a prescription counter, the theaters I've haunted, the churches I've crept into, the els I've ridden back and forth for hours, the books I've read down here—and all of it alone?"

"Still, you had one person," Carr said slowly. "The small dark man with glasses."

"That's right," she said bitterly, "we did meet again."

"I suppose you lived together?" Carr asked simply.

SHE LOOKED at him. "No, we didn't. We'd meet here and there, and he taught me how to play chess—we played for days and days—but I never lived with him."

Carr hesitated. "But surely he must have tried to make love to you," he said. "And when you realized there was no one in the whole world but the two of you..."

"You're right," she said uncomfortably. "He did try to make love to me."

"And you didn't reciprocate?"

"No."

"Don't be angry with me, Jane, but that seems strange. After all, you had only each other."

She laughed unhappily. "Oh, I would have reciprocated, except for something I found out about him. I don't like to talk about it, but I suppose I'd better. A few weeks after I ran away, I met him in another park. I came on him unawares and found him holding a little girl. She was standing there, flushed from running, looking very alive, her bright eyes on her playmates, about to rush off and join them. He was sitting on the bench behind her and he had his arm lightly around her and he was stroking her body very tenderly, but with a look in his eyes as if she were so much wood. Sacred wood, perhaps, but wood." Jane sucked in her breath. "After that I couldn't bear to have him touch me. In spite of all his gentleness and understanding, there was a part of him that wanted to take advantage of the big machine for his cold private satsifactions—take advantage of poor dead mechanisms because he was aware and they weren't. You've seen the same thing, Carr, in the eyes of Wilson and Hackman and Dris—that desire to degrade, to play like gods (devils, rather) with the poor earthly puppets? Well, something's corrupting my friend in the same way. He's never told me. But I know."

Carr said, "I heard Wilson tell Hackman that your friend had once been hers. It made her very angry."

"I might have guessed," Jane said softly. "That's where the nasty streak in him comes from. And that's why they're hunting him—because they're afraid he'll betray them to...still others."

"To the four men with black hats?" Carr asked.

She looked at him with a new fear in her eyes. "I never heard of them," she said.

"Go on," Carr urged.

"He must have run away from Hackman and Wilson and Dris," she said, her eyes seeing things distant. "And then, because he was lonely, he was drawn to me, one girl picked from a million. He didn't want to wake me, because he lacked the courage to love me or corrupt me, either. So he half wakened me, wanting to keep me in a dream world forever."

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She looked at Carr unsmilingly. "I never wanted to do anything like that to you," she said. "I came to you in desperation, when I was followed by Hackman. I ran into the office because I knew the place from Midge's boyfriend working there. The applicant's chair at your desk was empty. I thought you were just another puppet, but I hoped to fool Hackman by pretending to be part of the pattern around you.

"For you see, Carr, they'd never seen me clearly. Hackman couldn't be sure I was the girl in the alley, though I must have looked enough like her to make Hackman suspicious. And they don't like to use violent methods of testing whether a person is awake, because they don't want to disturb the world too much and they're afraid of attracting the attention of...still others. Though in the end she took the risk of slapping my face—and of course I had to walk on without noticing, like a machine.

"But as soon as I realized you were awake, Carr, I did my best to keep you out of it. I knew the only safe thing for you would be to stay in your pattern."

"How can a wakened person stay in his pattern?" Carr demanded.

"It can be done," Jane assured him. "Haven't you managed to stay in your pattern most of the time, even since you've known or at least suspected? Haven't you been able to do and say the right things at your office, even when you were terribly afraid that you couldn't?"

He had to admit that was so.

"Why, even I could go back to my pattern tomorrow," Jane continued, "go back to my parents and Mayberry Street and the academy, except—another drink, please—" (There were only drops, but they shared them) "—except that *they* know about me now, they know my pattern and so they'd be able to get me if I should go back.

"So I did my best to keep you out of it," she hurried on. "The first time I warned you and went away from you. Then that night, when you came to me with all your suspicions of the truth, I laughed at them and I did everything I could to convince you they were unreal...and I left you again."

"But even the first time," Carr said gently, "you left me that note, telling me where I could meet you."

SHE LOOKED away from him. "I wasn't strong enough to make a complete break. I pretended to myself you'd find that first note too silly to bother about. There's an unscrupulous part of my mind that does things I really don't want to...or perhaps that I really want to. The second time it made me drop that envelope with my address in front of the Beddoes house, where you'd remember it and find it the next evening."

"Wait a minute," he said, "how did you know I picked it up the next evening?"

"Because I was watching you," she admitted, dropping her gaze.

"Watching me?"

"Yes through a crack in one of the boarded-up windows."

"But why didn't you come out when you saw me?" Carr asked.

"I didn't want you to find me again. But I was worried about you, and when I saw you pick up that envelope I knew what you were going to do. So I followed you."

"To Mayberry?"

She nodded. "When you went in I waited outside, hiding in the shadows across the street, until Hackman and Wilson came. Then I ran around

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through the alley—"

"Remembering what had been there the last time?" Carr interrupted.

She grinned nervously. "—and went up the back stairs. I found you and my friend in the bedroom. He'd just hit you. Hackman and Wilson were killing Gigolo in the front hall—"

"Your cat?"

She shut her eyes. "Yes, Gigolo's dead."

She went on after a moment, "While they were doing that I told my friend who you were and we carried you down the back way to his car and..."

"How did your friend happen to be there in the first place?" he asked.

"He has queer habits," she said uncomfortably, "a sort of morbid sentimentality about objects connected with me. He often goes to my room, though I'm never there."

"All right, so you carried me down to his roadster," Carr said.

"And then we found your address in your pocketbook and drove you back to your room and put you to bed. I wanted to stay though I knew it wouldn't be safe for you, but my friend said you'd be all right, so—"

"—you departed," he finished for her, "after writing me that letter and leaving me those powders. What were they, by the way?"

"Just two sleeping tablets crushed up," she told him. "I hoped they'd get you started right the day after, help you get back into the pattern. Sleeping tablets are very useful there."

He shook his head. "I can't get back into the pattern, Jane."

She leaned toward him. "But you can, Carr. They don't know anything about you. They may suspect, but they can't be sure. If you stay in the pattern—your old job, your old girl—they'll forget their suspicions."

"I don't think I could manage it. I'd crack up," he said, adding in lower tones, "Besides, I wouldn't leave you."

"But I'm lost forever," she protested. "You aren't. You still have a safe path through life. You don't have to stay in the dark museum."

HE LOOKED around at the actual darkness of the stacks and for the first time it all really hit him. Chicago a dead city, empty as the aisles around them, but here and there at great intervals the faintest of evil rustlings. Hundreds of blocks of death, or non-life, and here two motes of awareness.

"No," he said slowly, "I won't go back."

"But you can't help me," she told him. "You'll only make it harder." She looked down. "It isn't because I think you can help me that the unscrupulous part of my mind keeps drawing you back."

"We could go far away," Carr said.

"We'd still be out of the pattern. More conspicuously than ever. And there would be other gangs."

"But at the worst these awakened ones are only people, Jane."

"You think so?" she said scornfully. "You don't think their minds are strong with the evil wisdom of the wakened, passed down from wakened mind to mind for centuries?"

"But there must be some decent wakened people in the world."

She shook her head. "I've never heard of any, only the cruel little gangs."

"There'd at least be your friend to help us," he persisted.

"After tonight? He's my friend no longer. Besides, fear will make him do anything. He can't be trusted."

"But I can help you," Carr insisted stubbornly. "I had a sign in a dream last night."

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"What was that?"

"It's fuzzy now, but you and I were prisoners somewhere, all tied up, and I cut your bonds and we escaped."

"Was that the finish?"

He frowned. "I'm not sure. Maybe something got us in the end."

"You see?"

"But that was only a dream," he protested.

"And a sign, you said."

"Jane, don't you understand? I have to help you." He started to put his arms around her, but she quickly got up and turned away.

"What's the matter?" he asked, following her.

She held her shoulders stiffly, but she had trouble speaking. "Go away, Carr. Go away right now."

"I can't, Jane."

"Now, Carr. Please."

"No, Jane, I won't."

She stood there a moment longer. Then her shoulders sagged. Carr felt the tension go out of him too. He rubbed his eyes.

"Lord," he exclaimed, "I wish I had another drink."

She turned around and her face was radiant. Carr looked at her in amazement. She seemed to have dropped her cloak of fear and thrown around her shoulders a garment that glittered.

"Come on," she said.

He followed her as if she were some fairy-tale princess—and she did seem to have grown taller—as she went three aisles over, pulled on a light, took down from an upper shelf three copies of *Marius the Epicurean*, stuck her hand into the gap and brought out a fifth of scotch.

His eyes widened. "You certainly do yourself proud."

She laughed. "Would you really like to see?" And recklessly tumbling down other clutches of books, she showed him a packrat accumulation of handkerchiefs, peanuts and candy, jewelry, cosmetics, even a long golden wig (she held that to her cheek a moment, asking him if he liked blondes), shoes, stockings, dresses, scarves, and all sorts of little boxes and bottles, cups, plates, and glasses.

Taking two of the latter, crystal-bright and long stemmed, she said, "And now will you have a drink with me, prince, in my castle?"

CHAPTER XIV

There's one nice thing about the world being an engine. It gives you something exciting to watch. You can even have some fun with it, kid it a little. But don't hurt the poor puppets...

LIKE TWO drunken pirate stowaways from the hold of a Spanish galleon, tipsily swaying and constantly shushing each other, Carr and Jane went up a narrow stair, groped through the foreign language section, and crossed the library's unlighted rotunda. Carr's heart went out to the shadows festooning the vast place. He felt he could fly up to them if he willed, wrap them around him fold on fold. They looked as warm and friendly as the scotch felt inside him.

Then, weaving behind Jane down a broad white stairway, it occurred to him that they might be prince and princess stealing from a marble castle, bound on some dangerous escapade. Here within, all gloom and silent grandeur, save where an unseen guard rattled his pike—say over there, by the elevator, or behind that high glass case. Outside, the city, restless and turbulent, holding wild carnival, but full of rebellious mutterings, "...in a nasty mood," the old Archduke had said, tugging his silvered sideburns. "'Twere well your majesties not show yourselves. I have given order to dou-

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ble the palace guard. If only we could set hand on those two young firebrands who raise this malcontent!" Here he knotted his veiny white fist. "The Flame, the girl is called. 'Tis said she bears a likeness to your majesty. Our spies are everywhere, we have set traps at every likely gathering place, but still the two elude us!"

Then, just as the Archduke was launching into his baritone solo, "The awful grandeur of the state strikes terror in men's souls," Carr realized that Jane had got through the door to the street. He followed her outside and halted, entranced. For there, beyond the wide sidewalk, was a most fitting continuation of his fantasy—a long low limousine with silvery fittings and softly glowing interior.

Then he saw that it was no pumpkin coach, at least not for himself and Jane, for approaching it at a stately waddle came two well-fed elderly couples, the men in top hats. Under the street lights, the features of all four were screwed up into an expression of germicidal haughtiness. While they were still some yards away, a Negro chauffeur opened the door and touched his visored cap.

Jane suddenly scampered straight at the sedate waddlers. Carr watched in growing amazement and delight as she veered off at the last moment, but in passing reached out and knocked off the nearest top hat. And the old fool wearing it marched on without even turning his head.

It hit Carr with all the instant impact of that crucial drink which opens the door to wonderland. There at his feet and Jane's lay the city—a playground, a nursery, a zoo, a congregation of lock-stepping robots, of mindless machines. You could do anything! No one could stop you!

With a whoop he raised his arms and ran lurchingly across the sidewalk at a wide angle that caught him up with Jane so that they raced around the corner hand in hand.

And now they were prince and princess no longer, but wizard's children with stolen cloaks of invisibility. Under their winged feet the pavement fled. Horns and streetcar bells struck up a dulcet, nerve-quickening music, as if for acrobats preparing for their star turn.

Across their path a theater lobby spilled a gabbling, cigarette-puffing, taxi-hailing horde. Oh, the beautiful joy of rushing through them, of jostling powdered shoulders, of hopelessly tangling half-donned overcoats, of plucking at ties and shawls under the glare of yellow lights, of bobbing up and gibbering like apes into stuffy, unseeing faces.

NEXT, IN an exhibition of hair-raising daring and split-second dexterity, to spring from the sidewalk and dart between speeding cab and green sedan, to jeer at the blind drivers, almost to slip and sprawl on gleaming tracks in front of a vast rhinoceros of a streetcar, to regain balance deftly and glide between moving chromium bumpers just beyond, finally to gain the opposite sidewalk, your ears ringing with a great shout of applause—and to realize you had uttered that shout yourself!

Oh, to hiss into the ear of a fat woman with smug suburban face, "The supreme court has just declared soap-operas unconstitutional," to scream at a solemn man with eleven-dollar shirt, "The Communists have set up a guillotine in Grant Park!" to say to a mincing, dopey-eyed sweater-girl, "I'm a talent scout. "Follow me," to a well-dressed person with an aura of superiority, "Gallop Poll. Do you approve of Charlemagne's policies toward the Saxons?" to a slinking clerk, "Bur-

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lesque is back," to a dull, beefy jerk in overalls, "Free beer behind the booths, ask for Clancy," to a fish-faced bookie, "Here, hold my pocket-book," to a youth, "Follow that man," to a slim intellectual with briefcase, at court-stenographer speed, "Watch the sky. A wall of atomic catastrophe, ignited by injudicious Swedish experiments, is advancing across Labrador, great circle route, at the rate of seventeen hundred and ninety-seven miles an hour."

And finally, panting, sides needled by delicious breathlessness, to sink to a curb and sit with back resting against metal trash box and laugh gaspingly in each other's faces, doubling up after each new glimpse of the blind, grotesque faces on the convey-or-belt called a sidewalk.

Just then a police siren sounded and a large gray truck grumbled to a stop in front of them. Without hesitation, Carr scooped up Jane and sat her on the projecting backboard, then scrambled up beside her.

The light changed and the truck started. The siren's wail rose in volume and pitch as a paddy wagon turned into their street a block behind them. It swung far to the left around a whole string of traffic and careened into a pocket just behind them. They looked into the eyes of two red-jowled coppers. Jane thumbed her nose at them.

The paddy wagon braked to a stop and several policemen poured out of it and into a dingy hotel.

"Won't find us there," Carr smirked. "We're gentlefolk." Jane squeezed his hand.

The truck passed under the dark steel canopy of the elevated. Its motor growled as it labored up the approach to the bridge.

Carr pointed at the splintered end of a barrier. "Your friend did that on the way down," he informed her amiably. "I wish he were along with us." He looked at Jane. "No, I don't," he added. "Neither do I," she told him.

His face was close to hers and he started to put his arms around her, but a sudden rush of animal spirits caused him instead to plant his palms on the backboard and lift himself up and kick his feet in the air.

He fell backwards into the truck as Jane yanked at him. "You're still quite breakable, you know," she told him and kissed him and sat up quickly.

As he struggled up beside her, the truck hustled down the worn brick incline at the opposite end of the bridge and grated to a stop at a red light. A blue awning stretched to the edge of the sidewalk. Above the awning, backed by ancient windows painted black, a bold blue neon script proclaimed: "Goldie's Casablanca."

"That's for us," Carr said. He hopped down and lifted Jane off the truck as it started up again.

INSIDE the solid glass door beneath the awning, a tall, tuxedo-splitting individual with the vacant smile of a one-time sparring partner, was wagging a remonstrating hand at a fist-swinging fat man he held safely pinned against the wall with the other. Carr and Jane swept past them. Carr whipped out several dollar bills importantly, then remembered that the world is a machine and dropped them on the floor. They descended a short flight of stairs and found themselves in the most crowded nightclub in the world.

The bar, which ran along the wall to their left, was jammed three deep. Behind it towered two horse-faced men in white coats. One was violently shak-

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ing a silver cylinder above his head, but its rattle was lost in the general din.

Packed tables extended from the foot of the stairs to a small, slightly raised dance floor, upon which, like some thick vegetable stew being stirred by the laziest cook in creation, a solid mass of hunchedly embracing couples was slowly revolving. The tinkly and near-drowned musical accompaniment for this elephantine exercise came from behind a mob of people at the far end of the wall to the right, which was lined with shallow booths.

Like tiny volcanos in the midst of a general earthquake, all the figures were spewing words and cigarette smoke.

Two couples marched straight at Carr. He swung aside, lightly bumping a waiter who was coming around the end of the bar, with a tray of cocktails. The waiter checked himself while the couples passed and Carr deftly grabbed two of the cocktails just as another couple came between them. He turned to present one of the cocktails to Jane. But she had already left him and was edging through the press along the booths. Carr downed one of the cocktails, put the empty glass in his pocket and followed her, sipping at the other. But as soon as he reached the first booth, he stopped to stare.

Marcia was sitting opposite a handsome young man with stupid eyes and not much of a chin. He sported white tie and tails. Marcia was wearing her silver lame, a dress with two fantastic flounces and a plunging neckline.

"Still, you tell me you've had a lot of dates with him," the young man was saying.

"I always have lots of dates, Kirby," Marcia replied sparklingly.

"But this . . . er . . . what's his name . . . Carr chap . . ." Kirby began.

"I sometimes go slumming," was Marcia's explanation.

Carr planked his elbow on their table and put his chin in his hand. "Pardon this intrusion from the underworld," he said loudly.

They didn't look at him. "Slumming can be amusing," Kirby observed.

"It can," Marcia agreed brightly, "for a while."

"And this . . . er . . ."

"The name's Carr Mackay," Carr said helpfully.

". . . er . . . Carr chap . . ."

"Believe me, Kirby, I've always had lots of dates," Marcia repeated. "I always will have lots of dates."

"But not so many with one man," Kirby objected.

"Why not?" she asked, giving him the eye, which seemed to put a new gleam in Kirby's. "How about starting tonight?" he asked.

"Dating?" Marcia said blankly. "Darling, we are."

"I mean at my place," Kirby explained. "You'd like it there."

"Would I?" Marcia asked mystically.

Carr reached his hand toward her, a gloating smile on his lips. Then suddenly he grimaced with self-disgust, drew back his hand, and turned his back on them.

CHAPTER XV

Love doesn't make the world go round, but it sure puts a spark of life in the big engine . . .

THERE HAD been quite a change in Goldie's while Carr's back was turned. The dancers had all squeezed themselves into hitherto imperceptible nooks and crannies around the tables.

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The mob had dispersed to reveal a grossly fat man whose paunch abutted the keyboard of a tiny, cream colored piano. A short apish individual who looked all dazzling white shirtfront—Goldie, surely, at last—was standing on the edge of the empty dance floor and saying in a loud harsh voice that would have been very suitable for a carp: "And now let's give the little chick a great big ovation."

Half the audience applauded violently. Goldie, ducking down from the platform, rewarded them with a cold sneer. The fat man's hands began to scuttle up and down the keyboard. And a blonde in a small black dress stepped up on the platform. She held in one hand something that might have been a shabby muff.

But even as the applause swelled, most of the figures at the tables were still jabbering at each other.

Carr shivered. Here it is, he thought suddenly—the bare stage, the robot audience, the ritual of the machine. Not a bacchanal, but a booze-fest to the music of a mindless Pan who'd gone all to watery flesh and been hitting the dope for two thousand years. The dreadful rhythm of progress without purpose, of movement without mind.

The blonde raised her arm and the muff unfolded to show, capping her unseen hand, a small face of painted wood that was at once foolish, frightened, and lecherous. Two diminutive hands flapped beside it. The blonde began to hum to the music.

Continuing to toy with the piano, the fat man glanced around briefly. In a tittering voice he confided, "And now you shall hear the sad tale of that unfortunate creature, Peter Puppet."

Carr shivered, finished his second drink in a gulp, looked around for Jane, couldn't see her.

"Peter was a perfect puppet," the fat man explained leisurely, accompanying himself with suitable runs and chords. "Yes. Peter was the prize Pinnochio of them all. He was carved out of wood to resemble a human being in complete detail, oh the most complete detail."

The puppet made eyes at the blonde. She ignored him and began to dance sketchily.

The fat man whirled on the tables, beetling his brows. "But he had one fault!" he half shrieked. "He wanted to be alive!" Again Carr shivered.

Going back to the lazy titter, the fat man remarked, "Yes, our Peter wanted to be a man. He wanted to do everything a man does."

Some guffaws came through the general jabber. The fat man's hands darted venomously along the keyboard, eliciting dreamy, pastoral tones.

"Then one lovely spring day while Peter was wandering through the meadows, wishing to be a man, he chanced to see a beautiful, a simply un-believably be-yutiful be-londe. Peter... ah, Peter felt a swelling in his little wooden... heart."

With all sorts of handclasps and hopeful gawkings, the puppet was laying siege to the blonde. She closed her eyes; smiled, shook her head, went on humming.

Carr saw Jane picking her way through the tables toward the platform. He tried to catch her eye, but she didn't look his way.

"...and so Peter decided to follow the blonde home." The fat man made footsteps in an upper octave. "Pink-pink-pink went his little wooden tootsies."

Jane reached the platform and, to Carr's amazement, stepped up on it. Carr started forward, but the packed tables balked him.

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THE BLONDE was making trotting motions with the puppet and the fat man was saying, "Peter found that the blonde lived right next door to a furniture factory. Now Peter had no love for furniture factories, because he once very narrowly escaped becoming part of a Sheraton table leg. The screaming of the saw and the pounding of the hammers..." (He did buzzy chromatic runs and anvil-chorusings) "...terrified Peter. He felt that each nail was being driven right into his little wooden midriff!"

Jane was standing near the blonde. Carr at last caught her eye. He motioned her to come down, but she only smiled at him wickedly. Slowly she undid the gilt buttons of her coat and let it drop to the floor.

"Finally conquering his terror, Peter raced past the furniture factory and darted up the walk to the blonde's home...pink-pink-pink-pink-pink!"

Jane had coolly begun to unbutton her white blouse. Blushing, Carr tried to push forward, motioning urgently. He started to shout at her, but just then he remembered that the world is a machine and looked around.

The crowd wasn't reacting. It was chattering as loudly as ever.

"Peter followed the blonde up the stairs. He felt the sap running madly through him."

Jane dropped her blouse, was in her slip and skirt. Carr stood with his knee pushed against a table, swaying slightly.

"Peter's throat was dry as sawdust with excitement." The fat man's hands tore up and down the piano. "The blonde turned around and saw him and said, 'Little wooden man, what now?' "

Jane looked at Carr and let her slip drop. Tears stung Carr's eyes. Her breasts seemed far more beautiful than flesh should be.

And then there was, not a reaction on the part of the crowd, but the ghost of one. A momentary silence fell on Goldie's Casablanca. Even the fat man's glib phrases slackened and faded, like a phonograph record running down. His pudgy hands hung between chords. While the frozen gestures and expressions of the people at the tables all hinted at words halted on the brink of utterance. And it seemed to Carr, as he stared at Jane, that heads and eyes turned toward the platform, but only sluggishly and with difficulty, as if, dead, they felt a faint, fleeting ripple of life.

And although his mind was hazy with liquor, Carr knew that Jane was showing herself to him alone, that the robot audience were like cattle who turn to look toward a sound, experience some brief sluggish glow of consciousness, and go back to their mindless cud-chewing.

Then all at once the crowd was jabbering again, the fat man was tittering, the blonde was fighting off a madly amorous puppet, and Jane was hurrying between the tables, her arms pressed to her sides to hold up her slip, with snatched-up coat trailing from one hand. As she approached, it seemed to Carr that everything else was melting into her, becoming unimportant.

When she'd squeezed past the last table, he grabbed her hand. They didn't say anything. Their eyes took care of that. He helped her into her coat. As they hurried up the stairs and out the glass door, they heard the fat man's recitation die away like the chugging of a black greasy engine.

It was five blocks to Carr's room. The streets were empty. A stiff breeze from the lake had blown the smoke from the sky and the stars glittered down into the trenches between the buildings. The darkness that clung

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to the brick walls and besieged the street lamps seemed to Carr to be compounded of excitement and terror and desire in a mixture beyond analysis. He and Jane hurried on, holding hands.

THE HALL was dark. He let himself in quietly and they tiptoed up the stairs. Inside his room, he pulled down the shades, switched on the light. A blurred Jane was standing by the door, taking off her coat. For a moment Carr was afraid that he had drunk too much. Then she smiled and her image cleared and he knew he wasn't too drunk. He almost cried as he put his arms around her.

...Afterwards he found himself realizing that he had never felt so delightfully sober in his life. From where he lay he could see Jane in the mirror. She'd put on his dressing gown and was mixing drinks for them.

"Here," she said, handing him a glass. "To us."

"To us." They clinked glasses and drank. She sat down and looked at him.

"Hello, darling," he said.

"Hello."

"Feeling all right?" he asked.

"Wonderful."

"Everything is going to be all right," he told her.

"Sure."

"But it really is, Jane," he insisted. "Eventually we'll awaken other people, people who won't go rotten. We'll find a way of taking care of Hackman and the others. You'll be able to go back to your place in the pattern. That'll give you a base of operations. I'll be able to go back too. And say—" (he suddenly smiled) "—do you realize what that will mean?"

"What?"

"It means that I'll have a date with you Saturday night, a date in the pattern. I've already met you through Tom Elvested and made a date with you. I first thought he was crazy when he introduced me to a Jane Gregg who wasn't there. But, don't you see, you were supposed to be there. That was your place in the pattern. Our paths are drawing closer together. We won't have to go outside the pattern to be together."

She smiled at him fondly. The telephone rang. Carr answered it. The voice was Marcia's. She sounded rather drunk.

"'Lo, Carr, I thought you should be the first person to hear the news of my engagement to Kirby Fisher."

Carr didn't say anything.

"No, really, dear," Marcia went on after a moment. "We're announcing it together. He's right beside me."

Still Carr said nothing.

"Come here, Kirby," Marcia called. There was a pause. Then, over the phone, came the smack of a kiss. "Do you believe it now, Carr?" she asked and laughed a little.

"Sorry, but that's life, darling," she said a few seconds later. Another pause. "You had your chance." Still another pause. "No, I won't tell you that. I wouldn't be interested in your making a scene now." A final pause. "Well, then you'll just have to suffer." Click of the receiver. Carr put his down.

"Who was it?" Jane asked.

"Just a doll jilting me," he told her, moving toward her.

The world seemed to narrow in like the iris diaphragm of a camera, until it showed only her soft smiling face.

CHAPTER XVI

When some guys wake up, they don't know whether to be decent

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or mean. They just teeter in the middle. Eventually they fall off, mostly on the mean side...

CARR HAS sleepy memories of the phone ringing, of Jane's voice, of her reassuring touch, of returning darkness. Then came dreams, very bad ones, that seemed to last an eternity. And when, under the spur of an obscure but pressing fear, he fought himself awake, it was as if a legion of demons were opposing his efforts.

The room was dim and swimming, it throbbed with his head, and when he tried to move he found himself weak as a baby. There was a sharp increase in his fear. Fumbling at the sheets, he managed to worm his way to the edge of the bed and roll out. He hardly felt the floor strike him, but the swift movement swirled the air around him and brought him an explanation of his fear.

He smelled gas.

The nearest window looked miles away and seemed to recede as he crawled toward it. When he finally got his chin on the sill, he found it shut. Inching his way upward, leaning against the glass, he got his paper-feeble fingers under the handles, heaved it up, and sprawled out head and shoulders across the sill, sucking the cold clean wind until he'd been sick and his strength began to return.

Then he remembered Jane.

Returning twice to the window for air, he managed to search the apartment, though his head was still splitting. On the first trip he turned off the gas hissing softly from the ancient wall-fixture and after the third he flung up the other window. A small Chicago gale soon cleaned out the stink.

Jane wasn't there.

He soused his face with cold water and prepared to think, but just then he heard footsteps in the hall. He stayed inside the bathroom door. The lock grated and the door opened softly and in stepped the small dark man with glasses. His left hand covered his mouth and pinched his nostrils shut. His right was returning a bristling key-ring to his pocket. He moved toward the gas fixture. Then Carr lunged toward him.

At the touch of Carr's fingers, the small dark man seemed to shrivel inside his clothes and he instantly bleated, "Please, please, don't! I'll do anything you say!"

Then, peering back fearfully, he recognized Carr and part of his terror seemed to leave him. But his voice was almost calflike as he continued wildly, "I'll confess! Only don't hurt me. I did try to murder you, but now I'm glad you're alive."

Carr shook him. "Where's Jane?" he demanded.

"I don't know."

"Yes you do. What have you done with her?"

"I don't know where she is, I tell you. Oh please don't hurt me any more. I knew she came here with you last night, because I followed you here from the nightclub. I went off and got drunk again. Then I came back this morning to have it out with you. I let myself into your room with my master keys—"

"And you weren't planning murder?" Carr interjected sardonically.

"No, no," the small dark man assured him, his eyes going wide, "It's just that I don't like to trouble people. I found only you in bed. I was drunk. My anger that she'd favored you got the better of me. For a moment I hated you terribly and so I turned on the gas and left. But my conscience bothered me and so I hur-

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ried back..."

"Hours later," Carr finished, thumbing at the window. "It's almost night now. No, I'll tell you why you came back to turn off the gas. Because you knew that if you didn't, no one else in the world would—and your kind is careful to tidy up after you."

THE SMALL dark man looked up at him fearfully. "You know about things then?" he quavered. "She's told you?"

"About everything," Carr answered grimly.

The small dark man caught at his sleeves. "Oh, then you'll understand how lonely I am," he said piteously. "You'll understand how much Jane meant to me. You'll sympathize with me."

"I'll beat you to a pulp if you don't tell me everything you know, quickly. About Hackman, Wilson, Dris—everything."

"Oh please," the small dark man implored, his gaze darting wildly around the room. Then a new spasm of terror seemed to grip him, for he began to shake pitiably. "I'll tell you, I swear I will," he whined, "Only it's so cold."

With an exclamation of contempt Carr went and slammed down the windows. When he turned back the small dark man had moved a few steps away from the gas fixture. But he stopped instantly.

"Go ahead," Carr said sharply.

"The whole story?"

Carr nodded. "Everything that's important. Everything that might help me find Jane."

"All right," the small dark man said. "I think you'll understand me better then." And he paused and his eyes went dead and his face seemed to sink in a trifle, as if something behind it had gone far away. His voice too seemed to come from a distance as he said, "It was Hackman who wakened me and took me out of the pattern. It happened in New York. Actually I'd been awake most of my life, but I hadn't realized that other people weren't. Hackman lifted me out of a grubby little life and pampered me like a pet monkey and satisfied my every whim, and for a while I gloried in my power and puffed myself up as a little prince, with Wilson my king and Hackman my queen. But then—" (he hesitated) "—it began to get too much for me. It wasn't that I got tired of living in millionaires' homes while they were in Florida, or while they weren't. Or that I got bored with spying on the secretest details of people's lives and sitting in on the most private conferences of great industrialists and statesmen—though the high and mighty lose their glamor fast when you catch on to the pattern, and the world-shaking incidents become trivial when you know they're conducted by puppets and that one event means no more than another. No, it was the vicious little impertinences and the outright cruelties that began to sicken me. I don't mean the dead girls—they were rather lovely, in a heartbreaking sort of way, though Hackman was always jealous and was careful to see I never went with them while I was alone. I mean the business of always slapping people when you were sure you couldn't be watched, and doing obscene things to them. And slipping plates of food out from under people's forks and watching them eat air. And watching the puppets write love letters and scrawling obscene comments on them. And that night Hackman got drunk and went down Broadway half undressing the prettier girls and..." (he winced) "...stick-

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ing pins in them. Meaningless perhaps, but horrible, like a child throwing pepper in the eyes of a doll." His voice trailed off to a whisper. "Though there was that child they dropped in the octopus tank at the aquarium—I really think she was awake. I got so I hated it all. At about that time Hackman wakened Dris and put me in second place, though she and Wilson wouldn't let me try to awaken a girl of my own. And then I met the four men with black hats."

HE SHIVERED again. "Please," he said, "I'm still very cold. Could I have a little drink?"

Carr fetched a bottle from the drawer. When he turned around the small dark man had moved again, though again he stopped instantly. He greedily drank the whiskey Carr poured him. Then he shuddered and closed his eyes.

"The four men with black hats were much worse," he said softly. "Strangling's the mildest use to which they put those black silk scarves they wear. They know how to waken others a little—enough to make them seem to feel pain. And they know how to paralyze people—to turn them off. I spotted them at work one day in a playground. That's how I caught on to them. I didn't tell Hackman and the others about them, because things were getting much worse between us. She'd taken to setting the hound to watch me and to seize me if I made a move, and then going away for hours with Dris and Wilson. They laughed at me and called me a coward. So I led them out one day and betrayed them to the four men with black hats, knowing that gangs like that would trade a million dead victims for one really live one.

"But my plan didn't work. There was a fight and the four men with black hats didn't quite manage to turn the trick, and Hackman and the others escaped. I fled, knowing that now both gangs would be hunting me, for the four men in black hats thought I'd put the finger on them.

"I fled to Chicago, but Hackman and the others followed me. The hound knows my scent although I try to disguise it. I kept away from them and tried to make a life for myself. I fell in love with Jane, but when I had half awakened her I was scared to go further. Then..."

The small dark man suddenly stopped dead. He was standing in front of the mantlepiece. He looked at the door. "Listen!" he whispered agitatedly. "What's that?"

Carr looked back from the door fast enough to see the small dark man whirling back around and stuffing his hand into his pocket. He grabbed the small man's wrist and jerked the hand out and saw that it held a paper. The small dark man glared at him fearfully, but wouldn't let go, so he slapped the hand hard. A crumpled paper fell from it. Carr picked it up, and while the small man cringed, sucking his fingers, Carr read the note the small dark man had tried to snatch from the mantlepiece undetected.

Darling,

Don't be angry with me. I'm going out for a while, but when I come back all our problems may be solved. My friend just called me—thank goodness the phones are dial here—and told me he's discovered a very important secret, something that will give us complete protection from Hackman and Wilson and Dris. I'm to meet him early in the evening. I'm leaving now, because I have

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certain preparations to make—and it's best that you don't come. I should be back by midnight, with wonderful news!

Lovingly,
Jane

CARR GRABBED the small dark man by the throat and shook him until his glasses fell off and he blinked up at Carr in purblind terror, pawing ineffectually at the choking hands.

"The truth!" Carr snarled. "Every bit of it!" And he stopped shaking him and slacked his grip a little.

For a moment only spittle and throaty babble came out of the small dark man's mouth. All at once he began to talk very rapidly.

"They made me do it, I swear! Hackman and the others caught me late last night when I was drunk, and they told me that if I didn't tell them where Jane was they'd give me to the hound. When I hesitated they forced me out onto the Boulevard, Hackman and the hound on one side of the street, Wilson and Dris on the other, and made me stay there, dodging the cars, until I'd promised. Even so I lied and told them I didn't know Jane's address, only a phone number she'd given me, and that it might scare her off if I asked her to meet me earlier than this evening. See, I did everything I dared to delay things! They made me phone her and told me what to tell her and listened while I made the date. Then they left me in an empty apartment with the hound guarding me, but he likes to snap things out of the air, so I tossed him sleeping pills until he went under. Then I hurried here to warn Jane, but she'd already gone. I didn't notice the note then, I was too frightened. And because I knew that with Jane gone you'd be happier dead, I turned on the gas. And now if you're going to kill me, please don't hurt me!"

"I can't promise that," Carr said, tightening his grip a little. "Where were you to meet?"

"On the corner of State and Harrison."

"Why Skid Row?"

"That's where they told me to tell her. That's where they have their fun these days."

"And when?" Carr demanded.

"At eight o'clock tonight."

Carr looked at the clock. It was seven-forty. He pushed the small dark man aside and began to throw on his clothes.

"Don't hurt me when you kill me," the small dark man begged with covered eyes from where he'd fallen across the bed. "Let me cut my wrists under warm water."

"Give me the keys to your roadster," Carr said, pulling on his shoes.

The small dark man sprang across the room, fell on his knees in front of Carr, and held out a small leather key-case. Carr took it.

"Where is it?" he asked.

"Parked right out in front," the small dark man told him. "Only now it's a maroon roadster. I wrecked the other last night when they caught me. You're not going to kill me?"

Carr caught up his coat and went out, shouldered into it while he was hurrying down the stairs. But fast as he went, he found when he got to the bottom that the small dark man was just behind him—and had found time to pick up the whiskey bottle on the way.

"You're going after Jane," he said, talking between swigs. "Don't. You haven't a chance. You don't realize their power and cunning, all the most horrible tricks of history passed down

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from wakened mind to mind since the days of Borgias and the Caesars. You don't know all the traps they're holding in reserve. Wait. Listen to me. There's an easier way, a safer way, a surer way..."

At the front door Carr whirled on him. "Don't follow me!" He ordered, grabbing the small dark man by the coat. "And remember, if you haven't told me the strictest truth, you'll wish the four men with black hats had got you!"

CHAPTER XVII

If the mean guys spot you walking around alive, you'd better think fast, brother...

CARR HAD never sweat so driving. It wasn't that the Loop traffic was thick, but the knowledge that there was no place for the roadster in the pattern. If he stopped, the auto behind him might keep on coming. He couldn't let himself get in any lines of vehicles. Mostly he drove on the wrong side of the street.

Finally he came to a place where the signs glared over low doorways, where their chief message was always "Girls and More Girls!" where dance music sobbed and moaned with dead passion, where only shabby and bleary-eyed automaton-men slouched through the dirty shadows. He passed State and Harrison twice without catching sight of Jane. The second time he parked the roadster in a no-parking stretch of curb just short of the black veil of the railway yards and left it with the motor running, hoping it wouldn't be hit. Then he started back, walking slowly.

He passed a tiny theater fronted by huge, grainy photographs of women in brassieres and pants painted bright orange. A sign screamed, "TWENTY NEW GIRLS!"

He passed a ragged old drunk sitting on the curb and muttering, "Kill 'em. That's what I'd do. Kill 'em."

He passed a slot-like store that said TATTOOING, then a jumbled window overhung by three dingy gilt balls.

He passed a woman. Her face was shadowed by an awning, but he could see the shoulder-length blonde hair, the glossy black dress tight over hips and thighs, and the long bare legs.

He passed a sign that read: IDENTIFICATION PHOTOS AT ALL HOURS. He passed a black-windowed bar that said: CONTINUOUS ENTERTAINMENT.

He stopped.

He turned around.

No, it couldn't be, he thought. This one's hair is blonde, and the hips swing commonly in the tight black dress.

But if you disregarded those two things...

Jane had shown him a blonde wig at the library.

She had written about making "preparations."

The walk could be assumed.

Just then his glance flickered beyond the shoulder-brushing blonde hair.

A long black convertible drew up to the curb, parking the wrong way. Out of it stepped the handless man.

On the other side of the street, just opposite the girl in black, stood Hackman. She was wearing a green sports suit and hat. She glanced quickly both ways, then started across.

Halfway between Carr and the girl in black, Wilson stepped out of a dark doorway.

Carr felt his heart being squeezed. This was the finish, he thought, the

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kill. The final blow.

Unless...

The three pursuers closed in slowly, confidently. The girl in black didn't turn or stop, but she seemed to slow down just a trifle.

...unless something happened to convince them that he and Jane were automatons like the rest.

The three figures continued to close in. Hackman was smiling.

Carr wet his lips and whistled twice, with an appreciative chromatic descent at the end of each blast.

The girl in black stopped. Carr slouched toward her swiftly.

The girl in black turned around. He saw Jane's white face, framed by the ridiculous hair.

"Hello kid," he called, saluting her with a wave of his fingers.

"Hello," she replied. Her heavily lipsticked mouth smiled. She still swayed a little as she waited for him.

PASSING Wilson, Carr reached her a moment before the others did. He did not look at them, but he could sense them closing in behind, forming a dark semicircle.

"Doing anything tonight?" he asked Jane.

Her chin described a little movement, not quite a nod. She studied him up and down. "Maybe."

"They're faking!" Hackman's whisper seemed to detach itself from her lips and glide toward his ear like an insect.

"I'm not so sure," he heard Wilson whisper in reply. "Might be an ordinary pickup."

Cold prickles rose on Carr's scalp. But he remembered to ask Jane, "That 'maybe' you're thinking of doing—how about us doing it together?"

She seemed to complete a calculation. "Sure," she said, looking up at him with a suddenly unambiguous smile.

"Pickup!" Hackman's whisper was scornful. "I never saw anything so amateurish. It's like a highschool play."

Carr slid his arm around Jane's, took her hand. He turned and started back toward the roadster. The others moved back to let them through, but then he could hear their footsteps behind them, keeping pace.

"But it's obviously the girl!" Hackman's whisper was a trifle louder. "She's just bleached her hair and is trying to pass for a street walker."

As if she feared Carr might turn, Jane's hand tightened spasmodically on his.

"You can't be sure," Wilson replied. "Lots of people look alike. We've been fooled before, and we've got to be careful with those others around. What do you say, Dris?"

"I'm pretty sure it's the girl."

Carr felt the whispers falling around them like the folds of a spiderweb. He said loudly to Jane, "You look swell, kid."

"You don't look so bad yourself," she replied.

Carr shifted his arm around her waist, brushing her hips as he did. The maroon roadster still seemed miles away. Fringing his field of vision to either side were blurred bobbing segments of Wilson's panama hat and pinstriped paunch and Hackman's green gabardine skirt and nyloned legs.

"Pretty sure, Dris?" Wilson asked doubtfully. "Well, in that case—"

Hackman leapt at the opportunity. "Let me test them," she urged.

Through the skimpy dress Carr felt Jane shaking.

"Put that away!" Wilson whispered sharply.

"I won't!" Hackman replied.

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A BLEARY-EYED man in a faded blue shirt lurched up onto the curb and came weaving across the sidewalk. Carr steered Jane out of his way.

"Disgusting," Jane said.

"I'd have taken a crack at him if he'd bumped you," Carr boasted.

"Oh, he's drunk," Jane said.

"I'd have taken a crack at him anyway," Carr asserted, but he was no longer looking at her. They had almost reached the roadster.

"Come on, kid," Carr said suddenly, stepping ahead and pulling Jane after him. "Here's where we start to travel fast."

"Oh swell," breathed Jane, her eyes going wide as she saw the chugging roadster.

"They're getting away," Hackman almost wailed. "You've got to let me test them."

Carr swiftly reached for the door.

"It might be better..." came Dris's voice.

Carr held the door for Jane. From the corner of his eye he saw Hackman's hand. In it was one of the stiff, daggerlike pins from her hat.

"Well..." Wilson began. Then, in an altogether different voice, tense with agitation and surprise, "No! Look! Across the street, half a block behind us! Quick, you fools, we've got to get out of here."

Carr ran around the roadster, jumped in, and pulled away from the curb. He started to give it the gun, but Jane touched his hand. "Not fast," she warned. "We're still playing a part."

He risked a quick look back. Hackman, Wilson, and Dris were piling into the black convertible. On the other side of the street, drawn together into a peering knot, were the four men with black hats.

That was all he had time for. He swung the roadster slowly around the next corner, squeezing it by a high-walled truck that spilled trickles of coal dust.

They hadn't gone a half block when they heard a souped-up motor roar past the intersection behind them without turning. Another half block and they heard another roar behind them that likewise passed on. They slumped with relief.

"Where'll we go?" Carr asked. "There's a lot to talk about, but I can't stand much more of this driving."

Jane said, "There's one place they don't know about, where we can hide out perfectly. The old Beddoes house. There are things I've never told you about it."

Carr said, "Right. On the way I'll tell you what happened to me."

CHAPTER XVIII

Maybe some day the whole engine'll wake. Maybe some day the meanness'll be washed, or *burned, out of us. And maybe not...*

THE ORNATELY-carved nine-foot door was of golden oak grimed with the years and it was bordered, Carr noticed, with a ridged blackness that once had been a rainbow frame of stained glass. It scuffed complainingly across humped-up rug, as the gate had across gravel. He followed Jane inside and pushed it shut behind them.

"I still don't like leaving the roadster that way," he said.

"We didn't want it too near here," she told him.

"But it's such a big thing to have displaced in the pattern."

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She shrugged. "It was probably a display model, if I know my.... friend. And I think the big machine has an automatic way of correcting large displacements like that. But look."

The circle of her flashlight's beam traveled over walls cobwebbed with soot, picked up here and there dull glints of a figured gold paper and huge pale rectangles where pictures had once hung. It jumped to two shapeless bulks of sheet-covered chairs, hesitated at a similarly shrouded chandelier looming overhead, finally came to rest on a curving stairway with a keg-thick newel post carved in the form of a stern angel with folded wings. Jane took Carr's hand and led him toward it.

"What do you know about John Claire Beddoes?" she asked him.

"Just the usual stuff," Carr replied. "Fabulously wealthy. Typical Victorian patriarch, but with vague hints of vice. Something about a mistress he somehow kept here in spite of his wife."

Jane nodded. "That's all I knew when I first came here."

The musty odor with a hint of water-rot grew stronger. Even their cautious footsteps raised from the tattered but heavily padded stair carpet puffs of dust which mounted like ghostly heads into the flashlight's beam.

"In spite of everything he did to us," Carr said, "I almost hate leaving your friend like that."

"He can't go on betraying people for ever," Jane said simply. "One of the reasons I brought you here is that he doesn't know about this place."

They reached the second-story landing and a door that was a mere eight feet high. It opened quietly when Jane pushed it. "I've oiled things a bit," she explained to Carr.

Inside the flashlight revealed a long dark-papered room with heavy black molding ornamented with a series of grooves that were long and very deeply cut, especially those in a picture rail that circled the room a foot from the ceiling. Round about were old-fashioned bureaus and chests and other furniture so ponderous that Carr felt it would take dynamite to budge them. While at the far end of the room and dominating it was a huge grim bed with dark posts almost as thick as the angel downstairs.

"Behold the unutterably respectable marital couch of the Beddoes," Jane proclaimed with a hint of poetry and laughter. Then she entered one of the alcoves flanking the head of the bed, laid the flashlight on the floor, and fumbled at the wide baseboard until she'd found what she was looking for. Then, still crouching there, she turned to the mystified Carr a face that, half illuminated by the flashlight's beam, was lively with mischief.

"To get the biggest kick out of this," she said, "you must imagine John Beddoes waiting until his wife was snoring delicately and then quietly getting up in his long white nightgown and tasseled nightcap—remember he had a big black beard—and majestically striding over here barefooted and...doing just this."

WITH THE words, Jane rose, not letting go of the baseboard. A section of the wall rose with her, making a dark rectangular doorway. She picked up the flashlight and waved Carr on with it.

"Enter the secret temple of delight," she said.

Carr followed her through the dark doorway. She immediately turned around, lowered the secret panel be-

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hind them, and switched off the flashlight.

"Stand still for a moment," she said.

He heard her moving around beside him and fumbling with something. Then came the scratch of a match, a whiff of burning kerosene, and the next moment a gold-bellied, crystal-chimnied lamp at his elbow was shedding its warm light on scarlet walls and scarcely tarnished gilt woodwork.

"The place is so sealed up," Jane explained, "that there's hardly any dust, even after all these years. There's some sort of ventilation system, but I've never figured it out."

The room that Carr found himself looking at with wonder was furnished with lurid opulence. There were two gilt cupboards and a long side-board covered with silver dining ware, including silver casseroles with spirit lamps and crystal decanters with silver wine-tags hanging around their necks. Some of the silver was inset with gold. Toward the end of the room away from the secret panel was a fragile-looking tea-cart and an S-shaped love seat finished in gilt and scarlet plush. The whole room was quite narrow and rather less than half the length of the bedroom.

Jane took up the lamp and moved beyond the love seat. "You haven't seen anything yet," she assured Carr with a smile. Then kneeling by the far wall, she drew up a narrow section which disappeared smoothly behind the gilt molding overhead.

"They're counterweighed," she explained to Carr and then stepped through the opening she had revealed. "Don't trip," she called back. "It's two steps up."

He followed her into a second room that was also windowless and about the same shape as the first and that continued the same scheme of decoration, except that here the furnishings were a gilt wardrobe, a littered gilt vanity table with a huge mirror in a filagreed gilt frame suspended on scarlet ropes with golden tassels, and a bed with a golden canopy and a scarlet plush coverlet. Jane pulled off her blonde wig and tossed it there.

"And now," she said, turning, "let me introduce you to the girl herself." And she lifted the lamp so that it illumined a large oval portrait above the wardrobe. It showed the head and shoulders of a dark-haired and rather tragic-eyed girl who seemed hardly more than seventeen. She was wearing a filmy negligee.

"She looks rather pale," Carr observed after a few moments.

"She should," Jane said softly. "They say he kept her here for ten years, though that may have been an exaggeration."

Carr walked on and looked through the archway in which the room ended. It led to a bathroom with gold, or gilded fixtures, including an ancient four-legged tub whose sides, fluted like a seashell, rose almost to shoulder height and were approached by little steps.

"Go on, look in," Jane told Carr as he hesitated in front of it. "There's no slim skeleton inside, I'm happy to report."

Before returning, Carr noted that all the fixtures were, though old-fashioned, so shaped that the water would swirl in and out silently.

JANE WAS fumbling with a gilt molding that ran along the wall at eye level. Suddenly it swung out and down along its length and hung there on hinges, revealing a black slit in the wall that ran the length of the room and was about an inch wide.

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"It opens into one of the grooves in the picture molding in the Beddoes bedroom," Jane explained. "Our being two steps higher makes the difference. If there were a light in there and we turned out our light, we'd have a good view of the place. I suppose John Claire used it to make sure his wife was asleep before he returned. And his young friend could have used it to spy on her lover and his lawful mate, if she were so minded."

Suddenly the cruel and barren possessiveness of the place and the terrible loneliness of the machinations of these long-dead puppets caught at Carr's heart. He put his arm around Jane and swung her away from the black slit.

"We'll never leave each other, never," he whispered to her passionately.

"Never," she breathed.

They looked at themselves curiously in the mirror they now faced. Their images peered back at them through a speckling of tarnish. With an uneasy laugh Carr went up to the vanity table and on an impulse pulled open the shallow center drawer.

There lay before him a small, single-barreled pistol, pearl-handled, gold chased. He picked it up and looked at the verdigreed rim of the lone cartridge.

"All the appurtenancies of a romantic *fin de siecle* lady of pleasure," he observed lightly. "Apparently never used it, though. I wonder if it was supposed to have been for herself or him, or the wife. The powder's as dead as they are, I'll bet."

Jane came to his side and pointed out to him, amid the jumble of objects on the vanity, two blank-paged notebooks bound in red morocco and two heavy gold automatic pencils with thick leads. Most of the pages in each notebook had been torn out.

"I imagine they used those to talk together," she commented. "He probably had a strict rule that she must never utter a single word or make a single sound." She paused and added uncomfortably, "You're bound to think of them as having been alive, aren't you, even when you know they were just robots."

Carr nodded. "No music..." he murmured, fingering through the other objects on the vanity. "Here's one way she passed the time, though." And he pointed to some drawing paper and sticks of pastel chalk. A yellow one lay apart from the others. Jane flicked it back among the rest with a shudder.

"What's the matter?" Carr asked.

"Something my friend told me," she said uncomfortably. "That Hackman and Wilson and Dris use yellow chalk to mark places they want to remember. Something like tramps' signs. Their special mark is a cross with dots between the arms."

CARR FELT himself begin to tremble. "Jane," he said, putting his arm around her. "On one of the pillars of the gate in front of this place, above a ledge too high for you to see over, I saw such a mark."

At that moment they heard a faint and muffled baying.

Jane whirled out of his arms, ran and lowered the panel between the rooms, came back and blew out the lamp. They stood clinging together in the darkness, their eyes near the long slit.

They heard a padding and a scratching and a panting that gradually grew louder. Then footsteps and muttered words. A snarl that was instantly cut off. Then a light began to bob through the bedroom doorway. It grew brighter, until they could see almost all of the bedroom through the crack with its tangled

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edging of dust and lint.

"Watch out," they heard Wilson call warningly from beyond the door. "They may try something."

"I only hope they do," they heard Hackman reply happily. "Oh how I hope they do!"

And then through the bedroom door the hound came snuffing. It was larger even than Carr had imagined, larger than any Great Dane or Newfoundland he'd ever seen, and its jaws were bigger, and its eyes burned like red coals in its short, ash-colored hair. He felt Jane shaking in his arms.

Hackman walked at its side, her eyes searching the room, bending a little, holding it on a short leash. There was a sticking plaster on her cheek where Gigolo had scratched her.

"Don't hurry, Daisy," she reproved sweetly. "There'll be lots of time."

Wilson and Dris entered behind her, carrying gasoline lanterns that glared whitely. Wilson put his down near the door. Dris, hurrying, stumbled into him with a curse.

Meanwhile Hackman and the hound had gone almost out of sight in the alcove. Suddenly she cried out, "Daisy, you stupid dog! What are you up to?"

Wilson, about to rebuke Dris, turned hurriedly. "Don't let him hurt the girl!" he cried anxiously. "The girl's mine."

"That's where you're wrong, you fat-bellied hasbeen!" Dris snarled suddenly. "I've played second fiddle to you long enough. This time the girl's mine." And he hurried past Wilson with his light. Wilson grew purple-faced with rage and tugged at something in his pocket.

"Stop it, both of you!" Hackman had returned a few steps, the hound beside her. They both did. Hackman looked back and forth between them. "There'll be no more ridiculous quarreling," she told them. "The girl's mine, isn't she, Daisy?" And she patted the hound, without taking her eyes off them. After a few seconds Wilsons face began to lose its unnatural color and Dris' taut frame relaxed. "That's good," Hackman commented. "It's much the simplest way. And you won't lose your fun. I promise you you'll find it quite enjoyable. Now come on back, Daisy. I think I understand what you were trying to show me." Once again she went almost out of sight, Wilson following her and Dris carrying the lamp.

"Where is it now?" Carr and Jane heard Hackman ask. There came a sound of eager scratching and snuffing. "Oh yes, I think I get it now. Let's see, one of these circles in the baseboard should press in and give me a fingerhold. Yes...yes. Now if I pressed them both together..."

Jane and Carr suddenly heard the voices coming more plainly through the wall between the hidden room than from the bedroom. And the next moment they heard the hound snuffing and scratching at the second secret panel.

"Another one, is there?" they heard Hackman say. "Well, it won't take long." Then she raised her voice in a shout. "Yoohoo, in there! Are you enjoying this?"

CARR TOOK the single-shot pistol from his pocket. Its fifty-year-old cartridge was a miserable hope, though their only one.

But just then there came a new sound—the sound of footsteps, on the stairs, growing louder, louder, louder. Dris, who, judging from the position of the light, had stayed in the alcove doorway, must have heard it too, for he called out something to the others.

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"Stay there!" Hackman hissed at the hound. "Watch!"

Then the three of them ran back into the bedroom, just as there sprinted into it the small dark man with glasses, his flying feet raising a puff of dust at each step.

He was past them before he could stop. Wilson and Dris circled in behind him, cutting off his retreat. Panting, he looked around from face to stonily-glaring face. Suddenly he laughed wildly.

"You're dead!" he squealed at them shrilly. "You're all dead!"

"This is a long-anticipated entertainment, darling," Hackman told him. She looked beautiful as she smiled. Then the three of them began to close in.

The satisfaction in the small dark man's expression was suddenly veiled by terror. He started to back away toward the alcove. "You called me a coward," he screamed at them wildly. "But I'm not. I've killed you, do you hear, I've killed you."

But he continued to back away as the others closed in.

"Run rabbit!" Hackman cried at him suddenly, and they darted forward. The small dark man whirled around and darted into the alcove. "Now, Daisy!" Hackman shrieked. There was a terrible snarl from the panel, and a thud, and a threshing sound and series of long high screams of agony. In between the screams Carr and Jane could hear Hackman yelling, "Oh, that's lovely, lovely! Get out of my way, Dris, I can't see. That's it, Daisy! Beautiful, beautiful! Hold up the light, Dris. Oh good, good dog!"

Carr struggled half-heartedly to get to the panel, but Jane held on to him. Then suddenly the screams stopped and a few moments later the bubbling gasps stopped too, and through the slit they could see Hackman march back into the bedroom in a state of high excitement.

"That's the most wonderful thing that's happened to me in months," she exclaimed, striding up and down. "Only it was much too quick. I could have watched forever." She managed to get a cigarette alight with shaking fingers and puffed it furiously.

The hound came slinking out after her and nuzzled her ankles. Red splotches appeared on her stockings.

"Oh get away, you filthy, lovely beast!" she rebuked him affectionately. "Go and watch like I told you." He slunk back into the alcove. Presently Jane and Carr could hear his low breathing just beyond the second panel.

Wilson and Dris, the latter carrying his gasoline lamp, had followed Hackman into the bedroom. They seemed rather less impressed with the whole affair.

"I wonder what he meant when he said he'd killed us?" Dris asked frowningly.

"Mere hysteria and bluff," Wilson assured him. "Typical cornered rat behavior." he smiled. "Well, that was just hunter's luck. Now for the real fun."

"Precisely," agreed a flat, cruel voice.

Hackman, Wilson and Dris all looked at the bedroom doorway. In it stood a pale young man wearing a black topcoat and a black snap-brim hat.

"This gives me great pleasure," he said and whipping a black silk scarf from around his neck he ran at Hackman. Three near-counterparts poured into the room at his heels. There was the scuff of darting footsteps, the jolt and thud of tumbling bodies, the whistle of effortful breaths.

"I can't bear to watch it, I can't,"

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Jane whispered, shrinking against Carr. But she watched it nevertheless.

ONE OF the black hats ran past the melee to the alcove. Carr and Jane heard four sharp reports, and a little later got a whiff of gunsmoke. The gunman quickly returned from the alcove, but his companions were winning their battle, though not without difficulty.

"I can't bear it," Jane repeated, but still she didn't close her eyes.

Soon it was quiet in the bedroom. The first of the black hats looked around rapidly, taking stock, as he tucked his scarf back inside his coat. "Roberto," he demanded, "was it quite necessary to kill her?"

"I'll say," the man replied. "She almost got my eye with that pin of hers."

The first of the black hats next addressed himself to the man who had run to the alcove, "Giovanni," he said, "you should not have used the gun."

"I thought it wise at the time," Giovanni asserted. "Though as it turned out he made no move at me. He just lay there and took it."

The first of the black hats chuckled. "All bark and no bite, eh? That's the way with most of them. Next time be wiser. Well, are we ready? No need to tidy up in a place like this."

"Shall we search further?" Roberto asked.

The first of the black hats shook his head. "No," he said, "that was all of them, and we're late as it is. Come on, now. Two of you bring the lanterns." In the doorway he turned. "Small dark chap," he said, "we are grateful." And he kissed his fingers and departed.

Carr and Jane heard the footsteps recede down the stairs, faintly heard the slam of a door, and a little later the roar of a souped-up motor. They clung together for perhaps ten minutes in shaking silence. Then Carr broke away and lit the lamp.

Jane hid her face from the light with her hands and threw herself down on the scarlet coverlet.

"I can't bear it," she sobbed. "Wilson's face...and Dris's head bent back that way...and what they did to Hackman...and before that the hound—I tell you, I'll go crazy!"

"Come on, dear," Carr urged anxiously, "We've got to get out of here."

"I couldn't go through that room," she cried wildly. "I couldn't bear to look at them. I'd lose my mind!"

Carr waited until her sobs had grown less hysterical. Then he said to her, "But don't you see what it means, dear? Everyone that knows you were awakened and out of the pattern is dead. The men with black hats don't know about either of us. We can go back to our own lives, and Saturday we're going to meet naturally in the pattern. We'll be together and safe and sure of our place and then we can slowly begin to waken others—people without the selfishness and cruelty of the little gangs. And I have an idea there."

Her sobbing ceased. She opened her eyes and looked at him.

"Maybe there are more wakened people than we realize," he said. People like we were, who have wakened without realizing that others are still asleep. People capable of love and sacrifice."

He looked at her. She lifted herself up a little. "Sacrifice," he repeated, "like your friend proved himself capable of. He must have led the men with black hats here deliberately, don't you see? Just as he must have led them to South State Street. He must

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have known that the others were planning to trap us here, he must have thought that he'd be wiped out whatever happened, but that we might be saved." He paused. "Maybe it came out of a bottle again, but just the same it was courage."

Jane sat up straight. "I'm ready," she said.

Carr knelt to work the panel, but he couldn't get the trick of it, immediately. "Let me," Jane said, and in a moment had slid it up. Taking the lamp, she started through ahead of him, averting her face from the pitiful form of the small dark man lying beside the love seat.

But Carr, peering over her shoulder as she went down the steps, did look at it—and found himself puzzled.

The mangled throat was hideous, to be sure, but in the otherwise unmarked face and forehead above it were what looked like a couple of neat bullet holes.

He seemed to hear Giovanni say again, "He just lay there and took it."

The lights had all been in the bedroom. In the shadows here Giovanni hadn't noticed that the small dark man was already dead. Naturally.

But in that case—

Soundlessly the hound rose from behind the loveseat and launched its gray bulk at Jane's throat.

Carr whipped his hand over Jane's shoulder. There was a flash, and a crack and a puff of smoke.

The hound's jaws snapped together six inches from Jane's throat and it fell dead.

Carr caught Jane as she collapsed back against him. He steadied the lamp.

He looked down at the pearl-handled pistol in his hand.

"The powder was still good," he said...

GET ON THE FLYING BALL!

★ By WILLIAM KARNEY ★

THE U.S. is second to none when it comes to invention, design or construction. We've got the tools, the brains and the men! In atomic physics, rocketry and jets, electronics—you name the subjects—we don't take a back-seat for anyone.

That is, in all except one field...

Everybody agrees that the future of aviation lies in the turbo-jet, the straight jet, and the rocket. In military and naval aviation, we're using all of these things. And we're going places with them.

But for some strange reason, in commercial aviation, we're lagging. In fact, we're almost standing still.

The British have half a dozen different varieties of jet and turbo-powered transport planes in the finished stages; they're being tested now. Are they going to assume our leadership in aviation?

Right now, the names of American planes are known all over the world. The commercial airlines of almost every country on Earth use our planes. American aircraft construction has a reputation. But the use of ordinary reciprocating engines is certainly on the way out. The future lies with the jets.

We're not building jet airplanes for transports though. Instead we're letting a golden opportunity to make American flying history—not to mention prestige and money—slip right through our fingers.

A few airplane manufacturers are waking up and begging Congress for subsidies and Government interest to promote this commercial field. Let's hope they succeed before it's too late. It's a good thing that the government has to be interested in rockets because of their military value. Otherwise they might ignore them too. What a tragedy! The first rocket to the Moon must be an American job. We'd never live it down in a technological world if we weren't the first to throw a projectile in that direction.

Come on Uncle Sam, wake up and get on the ball. The ordinary airplane engine is as outmoded as the horse and buggy. Start building commercial jets. We want to go from New York to Paris in five or six hours!

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THE FINAL TEST

★ By H. R. STANTON ★

SOMETIMES it's a great relief to climb down from the Olympian heights of theoretical physics into the solid earthy realm of the laboratory. Abstruse reasoning sometimes vague and shadowy is a necessary part of thinking, but once in a while it's a good idea to take some tools in hand and start measuring and working.

The science-fiction reader gets the same feeling when he puts away a super-scientific novel and sinks his literary teeth into a meaty tasty tale of action, laced here and there with a dash of blood and thunder. Even the gourmet tires of caviar *all* the time.

That's why it's such a pleasure to go into a modern engineering laboratory of a plant and see a bunch of men with their sleeves rolled up, going to town with machinery and equipment. Maybe they're handling delicate optical instruments or maybe they're working with gigantic lathes or planers, but the end effect is the same—they're handling *things*, not ideas.

We need both thought and action to make us scientifically strong. Don't believe for a moment, that just because you don't have a strong mathematical aptitude for example, that the world of scientific investigation is closed to you: just remember that Faraday and Edison, to mention but two, didn't know beans about theory—but the elecrtic motor and the incandescent lamp are here to stay!

Furthermore, the laboratory where the working men gather, is the final scientific judge. With all its high-flown theories, modern physics—all science—wouldn't mean a thing without the data pouring from the test benches. Even Einstein's famous theory had to face the merciless test of astronomical observation.

So here's to the men who gather facts and data; they don't usually make as spectacular headlining as the fly-fly boys but like the airplane mechanics, *they* make the jets fly!

★ ★ ★

PLUTONIAN FOUNDRY

★ By MILTON MATTHEW ★

THE SPACEMEN'S BAR has been the witness of many strange tales and weird experiences. It is sometimes regarded as a sort of explorer's club and the management does everything to encourage this. If you're looking for an entertaining evening drop down sometime and talk with the men who do the dirty work in deep space. It's fascinating...

"I just got back from a Plutonian hop," the bronzed muscular man said, "and I'm still freezing." He slapped his hands to his sides as if to warm them.

"Have another hooker of *zinth*," John Clondon said laughing, "That'll take the chill out of your bones, Frame."

Frame laughed too: "Thanks, I can use it."

The two men were at the Spacemen's Bar exchanging stories of their latest activities.

"What was up on the Pluto skip?" Clendon asked.

"Usual cargo trip," Frame shrugged, "medicinals and so forth. But I wanted to see what the amoeboids really lived like. Believe me, the Videos don't lie. Those crystalline monstrosities are slow and sluggish and they look exactly like amoebas, but I guess they get along all right. But try to imagine a trip to one of their foundries! I did it—I mean, I was there!"

"Yes," Clendon observed, "that must be odd—theirs is a water crystal metabolism, right?"

"You said it," Frame answered. "Just think—to them water is intensely hot! And as for us humans—we're simply radiant portions of a sun almost. Well, what I started to say was that I spent some time in their foundries.

"I wore a regulation space-suit of course—plus about eight hundred pounds of insulation so that I didn't burn up the Plutonians. Walking into the foundry was the equivalent of going into a refrigerator. The Plutonians were working around, pouring water into plastic molds and in general carrying on just as you would expect in any foundry—except the molten material was water!

"I gave them quite a jolt when I stuck a hand in the water. To them it was as if someone had thrust his hand into a ravenous cylinder of molten radiance.

"I spent about two hours watching the operations which were conventional. But they asked me to leave shortly afterwards; it seems my body temperature was making the foundry uncomfortable for the regular workers!"

Clendon laughed. "What an experience," he said, "I can just imagine how the Plutonians must have felt. Can you imagine us encountering people whose body temperature is that of the sun?"

Frame looked at him steadily. "Yes," he said, "I can—and it wouldn't surprise me a bit if eventually we ran into such a race. Is it any more fantastic than the Plutonians..."

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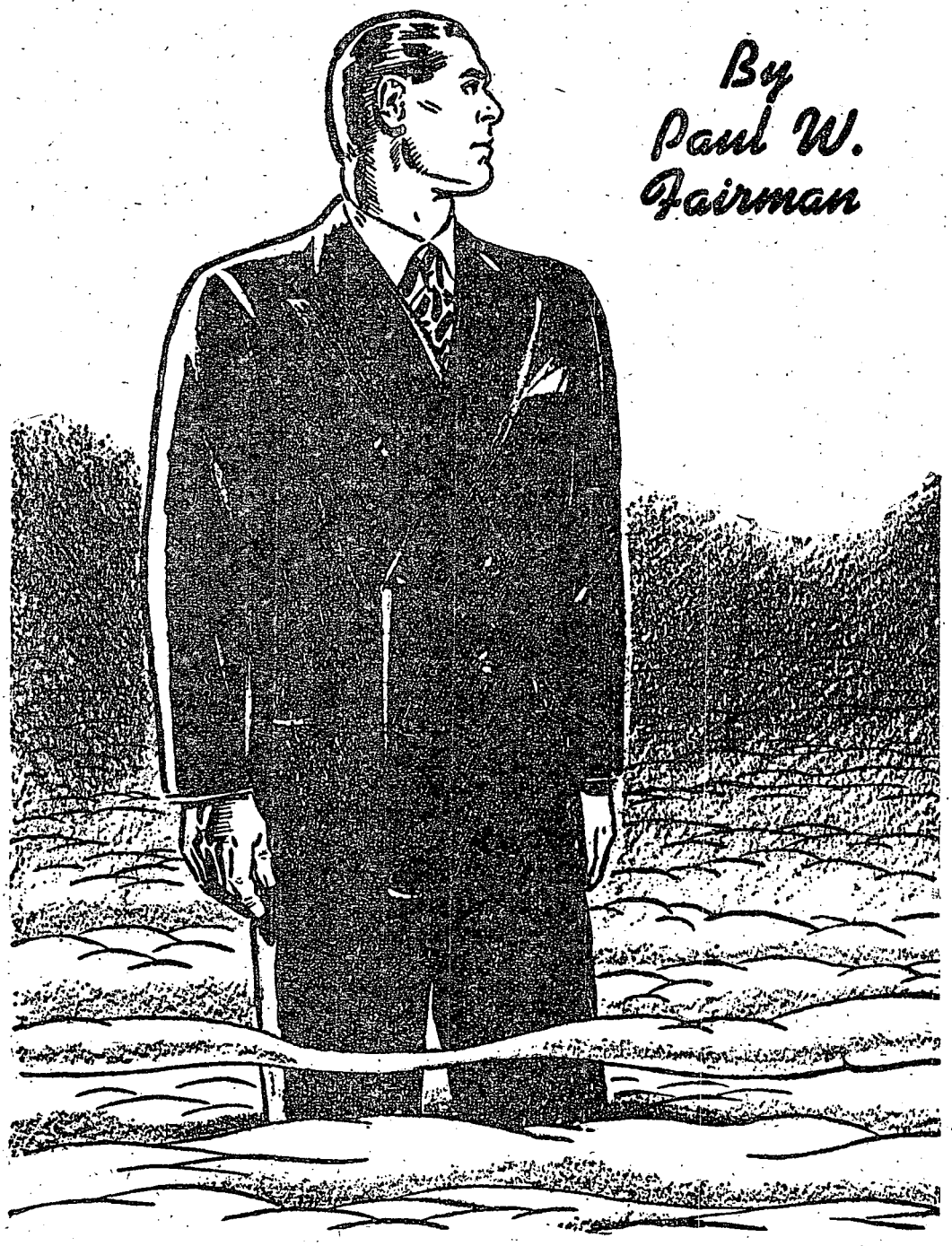
The BROKEN DOLL

By Paul W. Fairman



There were tears in the little girl's eyes as she pointed to the broken doll . . .

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The Great Man had passed on to his final reward—but he couldn't claim it until—

THE GREAT MAN was dying. He lay in state, dying as all Great Men should die. There were specialists from all over the world who stood at his bedside and pooled their knowledge that he might have a few more hours of life.

There were bulletins of grave import sent hourly to the waiting millions so they would know the Great Man was sinking, rallying, sinking, sinking.

These were the millions upon whom he had left his mark, whose lives had been affected by the actions of this Great Man. They thought of him in many ways—put various labels upon him: He kept us out of war. He got us into war. He spent money foolishly. He spent money with wisdom and compassion. He was a humanitarian and a builder. He was a frustrated psychopath, a destroyer. But they all knew of the Great Man and his dying would cause a hush to fall over the world.

It was a source of satisfaction to the Great Man that his mind had remained clear during his illness. He had always hoped it would be this way when death came for him. There was no fear whatever in him, but rather a keen interest and a large curiosity about what would soon be revealed. And he was grateful that, for once, there would be upon him no weight of immense and terrible decision. During his whole career as a world figure, it had been that way; crisis after crisis boiling up among men and among nations and among groups of nations. And always a decision to be made by the man in power, by himself alone—the Great Man. But there was no weight of conscience upon him. His decisions had, he felt, been made wisely and if the after-life was really constructed along the lines of certain human imagery, he believed he would be honored beyond death for having made them.

These were the thoughts in his clear, unmisted mind when death walked past the specialists and stilled his breath with a gesture of long practice.

The Great Man was dead.

* * *

What happened to him he did not know nor greatly care. Concerning death he knew only that the mechan-

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ics of it, the transitions involved, were over and done; he knew he was dead and his explanation of the process was simplicity itself— A baby knows nothing of birth; yet it needs no assurance of being alive. I know as little about dying, he thought, as I knew before; yet I know I've passed through it because this, obviously, is death.

It was as simple as that but there was something else. One facet of knowledge—the answer to sixty odd years of wondering:

I have not lost my identity. I have not, through my death, become nothingness! I am still myself! It was a triumphant thought—a heady ecstasy, but it was swept instantly away by more pressing contingencies —by the Angel.

Through want of something more appropriate, he gave this title to the entity now standing beside him in this place to which he had come. The place itself was strange and yet not so because it did not occur to him to describe it to himself any more than a new-born babe seeks to describe the beating of its tiny heart.

Thus did he charge off the place, but the Angel was something a little different. The Great Man got a first impression—one which remained—of a most earnest and sincere young student. There was the frank, open look upon the face of the Angel; a mixture of wonder and knowledge in the Angel's eyes; the entirely objective nature shining from within.

THE ANGEL regarded the Great Man in complete silence, with an attitude neither cordial nor hostile. He spoke no word and the Great Man had a feeling that something should be said.

Several logical questions came into his mind: Is this Heaven? Am I to meet St. Peter? Will there be a session of judgement before the throne of God? But he remained silent because asking these questions seemed a little like reciting nursery rhymes to a nuclear scientist. Then a less asinine opening came to his mind:

"I am ready," he said.

"Ready for what?" the Angel asked.

"Why—for whatever is to come—wherever I must go."

"Your attitude is most commendable, but unfortunately there is no place to go at the moment. For you, what is to come has not been decided."

"Then the orthodox religionists are correct in many things. Then a man's reward after death hinges upon his acts in life?"

"Most assuredly. If you can think of any other system under which justice can function, I'd certainly be interested in hearing about it."

The Great Man sighed. "Frankly," he said, "I'm relieved to hear that. I'd hoped it was true, because my actions in life are an open book. I discharged my responsibilities to the best of my ability. I'll defend my deeds before any judge or counsel of judges you produce."

The Angel regarded him almost pensively. "I'm very glad to hear you say that. A man sure of his own position is always better able to cope with whatever the future brings."

The Great Man stood to his full height and took on the air of authority which had become to him a second nature, an instinct. "Who will my judges be?" he asked.

When the Angel did not reply, the Great Man went on. "The reason I asked is this: The analyzing of my actions on earth will be a pretty big job. The responsibilities I held were of gigantic proportions. I was the leader of the richest most powerful nation earth ever saw and my decisions

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were of vast import. They affected the lives of every human being."

"And you are afraid," the Angel cut in, "the judges will not be able to render a clear and just verdict?"

"Well—not exactly that—but—"

The Angel turned and waved a hand. "Here is your judge," he said, and suddenly there were three of them there in the place: The Great Man, the Angel, and the Child.

There was the soft voice of the Angel saying, "This is Teena," and the Great Man stared in wonder. There was something here he didn't understand; something he couldn't grasp.

Teena was possibly six years of age, certainly not more than eight. She had large brown eyes and a small rosebud of a mouth. She stood on stocky little legs and cradled in her arms was a crushed and broken doll. One leg of the toy was hanging from the hip by a thread. The head had been smashed and sawdust was dripping from the body.

"This is Teena, your judge," the Angel repeated and the Child stepped forward and looked up at the Great Man. In her eyes there were several diamonds that welled up and slid down her cheeks to make clean little rivers through the grime on her face. And in those eyes was the most pitiful misery of all—*the lack of ability to understand an injury*. She stood for a moment, unmoving, then she raised her arms and what was in them toward the Great Man.

"You broke my doll," she said.

THE GREAT MAN did not dislike children. In fact, often on earth, he had been a moving force in child welfare philanthrophies. He had been photographed with children on his lap and there was nothing hypocritical in his recorded smiles.

But this was absurd. Here, with great issues at stake, his whole monumental life due for judgement—this was absurd! "What sort of joke are you playing?" the Great Man snapped. "I had nothing to do with breaking this child's doll!"

The Angel's voice was calm, unhurried, utterly without emotion; "Teena was a girl-child living in a certain country on earth. The name of the country isn't important, but it was one of the many which figured in your momentous decisions. As a result—let us say an indirect result—of your signature on a sheet of paper, a fleet of bombers flew over this country and spilled tons of explosives on the ground below. Teena was killed by one of those bombs as were thousands of others like her."

The Great Man reared to his full indignant height. He sought words, but the Angel raised a hand and went on. "You see Teena doesn't understand why she had to die or why her doll had to be broken. Now, here you are and here she is, so perhaps you can explain it to her."

Teena's mouth was a pouting flower. There was accusation in her eyes. "You've got to fix my doll," she said.

The Great Man relaxed. He smiled at the Child and then turned the same smile on the Angel. "I love children," he said. "I've always loved them." His words were sincere and spoken naturally and were no doubt accepted for their true worth by the Angel. No direct reply was forthcoming however. Instead:

"Possibly you didn't hear the child. She said you must fix her doll."

There was heavy color in the Great Man's cheeks. "I think we've had enough of this by-play. I appreciate it as much as the next man but—"

"I assure you," the Angel said, "it is not by-play."

"Very well. I'll answer the charge.

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Evidently you hold me responsible for this child's death. I deny it. In the complex structure of world politics, leaders must take all the factors into consideration. They are beset on all sides by various factions each with its own axe to grind, each with a mission worthy or unworthy. There are intertwining philosophies, greeds, ambitions, intrigues and jealousies. All these find their way to the leader and he must act for the greatest good."

"I see," the Angel replied gravely. "I'm deeply interested in these things, but I'm puzzled. I wonder if you would explain to me just how the killing of Teena served the greatest good."

The Great Man made a gesture of futility. How does one go about explaining things to an idiot, he wondered. In front of him, the Child was still holding up the broken toy. "You've got to fix my doll," she repeated stubbornly.

He made another impatient gesture and turned to the Angel who was speaking again. "I don't think we will get very far," that entity stated, "until you understand with whom you are dealing. You seem to regard Teena pretty much as she was regarded on earth; someone without power and therefore to be given last consideration. I assure you sir, you are making a grave mistake because HE has decreed otherwise. Concerning Teena and her kind, HE said, 'for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'"

FOR THE first time the soft impersonality went out of the Angel's voice. There was the crack of whips in his tone and to the Great Man he seemed almost human when he said: "There is a simple, direct statement, and if you think HE was fooling, mister, let me put you straight!"

The Angel raised a hand and the place and everywhere above and below and beyond the place seemed to come alive. The change was swift, overwhelming. The Great Man braced himself and yet he was not bewildered. It was within him to know what was going on around him and to define the substance in which he now stood.

It was POWER. Pure, basic, unadulterated POWER. The place was gone, obliterated by the very presence of FORCE, and he realized exactly what was being paraded before him. Over there this pure stuff was rending a galaxy into powder and gaseous matter. Here, before his eyes it was rotating the protons and neutrons on an atom in perfect and disciplined rhythm. Here was the primary element of all things and the Great Man felt the sickness of a terror almost too great to withstand.

But Teena clapped her hands and laughed as a multi-colored rainbow lifted her gently up into a beam of blinding light.

The Great Man was down on his knees before the Angel, an arm thrown across his eyes. He heard himself begging, mumbling; "Please—please—no more—I can't stand—"

But there was no POWER—no terror now, and the Great Man felt himself a fool as he got to his feet because there was only the place. The Angel was there, and the Child holding out the smashed toy. "You broke my doll," she said. "You've got to fix it."

In life the Great Man had been known for his tremendous recuperative powers. He straightened again into a posture of dignity and fixed his cold blue eyes on the Angel.

He said, "I still maintain there is no justice in all this. I should have the right to argue my case before a wise tribunal—before those who can understand the problems with which I

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was beset—the issues at stake."

The Angel considered this while the Child stood patiently holding forth the doll. Encouraged by the Angel's hesitation, the Great Man pressed his point:

"On earth the machinery of justice is known as the court of law. If I were to be judged there, the judgement would take months, maybe years. I would have the benefit of legal counsel and every phase of my career would be brought up, argued, weighed. I'm certainly entitled to as much up here."

The Angel smiled. "Let me ask you this. Would you say, as a result of these earth-trials, that justice was always served?"

"Well—not always, but we were sincere in striving to serve justice."

"No doubt, but another question: Was there ever a case of a lawyer in your earth-courts defending and obtaining acquittal for say a murderer whom that lawyer knew to be guilty beyond any shadow of doubt? An acquittal through sheer trickery and dishonesty?"

The Great Man frowned. "Well—yes, I suppose so, but—"

"There has never been such a case up here," the Angel replied softly.

The Great Man replied without thinking; "But this is heaven," he said.

The Angel smiled at this; "Quite right. And up here we go about things a little differently. Let me put it this way—of all HIS creatures, which is most clearly free of prejudice in any form—of hatred, ambition, cruelty, greed, or vindictiveness; and yet, being made in HIS image, possesses HIS simple, uncomplicated precepts of right and wrong, of justice and mercy?"

"Why—if you put it that way—"

"What better way is there to put it? A child. Therefore, why shouldn't a child judge you?"

There was perspiration on the Great Man's forehead. "By the way—what is the punishment—if I'm found guilty?"

"Oblivion in your case. Punishments vary but at your stage of development it is the worst possible fate; to lose your identity; to become again a part of the primal life-substance from which you sprang."

AND THE Great Man knew this was correct because a sickness came over him; a horror such as he had never before known. To be nothing! To be a something, even in eternal agony, was better than to be *nothing;* to cease existence.

"But a fair trial— A—"

"Let's have done with all that," the Angel said sharply. "Up here there is right and wrong—justice and injustice. On earth, you knew right and wrong—HE saw to that. Therefore you knew any system of logic, reasoning, or self-excuse by which you allowed this child to be killed was *wrong!* That's what it adds up to and everything else is conversation. Now the time has run out and it's all between you and the child."

The Great Man fell to his knees and rocked back and forth. "To be nothing! To be oblivion—"

The Angel's eyes were cold and impersonal now. "If you would stop blubbering for a moment you'd realize how fortunate you are to have a child as a judge. Consider, please! A bomb you caused to be manufactured was sent across an ocean in an airship you caused to be manufactured and that bomb was dropped on this child. She was blown to bits and for that she should hate you. She should enjoy calling all the forces HE puts at her command to annihilate you, to smash you."

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"Please—"

"But does she do this? No. All she asks is that you fix the doll she held in her arms when the bomb fell. I consider you pretty fortunate, mister, and I'll say this—*You'd better fix that doll.*"

The Great Man groped blindly toward the Child and took the doll in his hands. With clumsy fingers—the fingers which had signed documents changing the course of human life, he sought to draw together the torn cloth and keep the sawdust from spilling out.

While the Child watched gravely, he broke the thread holding one arm and made a loop around the body of the doll. The other end of the string he fastened to the arm and the Child inspected the work critically. "I guess it will do," she said. "Now the face."

The face was smashed into shapeless chalk and as the Great Man fumbled with it, he felt a horrible emptiness within himself. He felt his mind and senses fading. The start of oblivion.

"I—I can't," he moaned. "I have no tools. You can't fix a doll without tools!" There were sobs in his throat and he clawed at the doll through a haze of tears—

"You should have felt the same way about the bombers. You built thousands of them. You arranged the lives of millions of humans. Now you can't fix a simple doll. That, my friend, is your misfortune."

The Great Man felt the emptiness growing. There was within him the burning need of something to cling to —something to hold now that heaven had forsaken him. He raised his face and there, close by, were the eyes of the Child.

Her hand came out and brushed his cheek. The eyes were large and full of pity. "Why are you crying? You shouldn't cry or you'll make HIM sad."

She reached out and took the doll from his hands but her eyes remained on his face. She seemed involved in a great and weighty decision. Then she smiled and said;

"I don't think you *meant* to break my doll. Anyway, you *tried* to fix it."

And for the Child, who had lived too short a time on earth to learn anything of hatred or vengeance—that was enough.

The Child laughed. The Angel smiled as the Great Man got to his feet and found, through his tears, the hand of the Child.

"Let's go see HIM," the Child said, "I'll show you the way because HE let's me come anytime." And she led him away up a mighty rainbow staircase.

And there was a thought in the Great Man's mind: *I wish I could let them know. I wish I could tell them how simple it really is. I wish I could tell them how much of it is only conversation...*

But he knew they'd have to find that out for themselves.

THE END

THE WOOFER AND THE TWEETER

★ By CARTER T. WAINWRIGHT ★

A LOT OF PEOPLE like to listen to music, bebop, jazz, popular, and classical. Furthermore they like their music with quality—that is, they like to hear *all* the sounds the musicians put into their work. But unfortunately, they rarely do. The quality of the music heard over the average table model, console model, or portable radio, simply stinks! And the quality of the sound that comes from the average television set is usually much worse than that!

In an effort to make cheap commercial sets, radio and TV manufacturers use

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naturally the simplest electronic circuits, the cheapest electronic components. Of course, where the quality of parts is not conspicuous—as in the sound-system of the TV receiver, they really put in the minimum. Just examine the size of the loudspeaker of most TV and radio sets if you want to see an actual visible example of poor quality. Nine out of ten sets use speakers which no more than five to eight inches in diameter. It is merely a physical fact that these speakers cannot reproduce a wide range of sound.

Now the vast majority of people are not too concerned with the quality of the sound that comes from their set. But a growing number has become interested in this matter. Failing to obtain commercial satisfaction they've taken things into their own hands. Lovers of any sort of music, interested in hearing exact high fidelity reproduction of sounds, have gone into combining their own sound reproducers.

These fanciers of quality musical reproduction have been building their own amplifiers, selecting their own record players and phonographs, choosing their own "pick-ups" and loudspeakers. The result is that there is now available a whole range of fine equipment which can be bought or assembled at a reasonable price and which will reproduce anything the human ear can hear!

Furthermore this doesn't cost a fortune. The components are standard parts—just lots more of them where they're needed. The sound pick-ups with styli (needles) are fine little machines which translate motion into sound perfectly. The amplifiers contain the requisite number of tubes, are correctly designed and mounted and build up an insignificant signal a million times! The loud-speakers are ingenius constructions, consisting of two reproducing devices in one: a large twelve or fifteen inch cone for giving out the deep bass resonant notes, and a tiny, tiny little metal diaphragm for delivering the high-pitched tones. The former is called a "woofer" and the latter a "tweeter."

The whole thing ends up with the fact that now if you want quality reproduction of musical or vocal sound from FM, AM, or records, you assemble or buy units like those described above—and you get it!

It's an example of a common fact in the technological wonderland of the United States. If you don't see what you want or you can't buy it, get the tools and build it! That's just one of the things that makes this country great!

☆ ★ ★

ELECTRICAL LILLIPUT

★ BY JON BARRY ★

WE HAVEN'T really gotten into the heart of the atom yet, nor can we explore the truly microscopic world—but we're very close to it! Everything is getting smaller and more compact, from milady's handbag to Joe Blow's TV set. It's the latter thing which is representative of the changes that have come about in electronics.

A couple of years ago we brought out the story of printed electronic circuits, which are "drawn" on ceramic plates with conducting and resistive inks, making for incredible compactness. These things were laboratory curiosities a short while ago. Now it's hard to pick up a new piece of radio equipment, a hearing aid, a TV set, a radio, an instrument, or almost any other type of electronic machine without finding in its interior a surprising number of these printed circuits. Nowadays there is very little lag between a new discovery and its almost immediate application.

Cheaper, more compact, more efficient, neater-looking, these simple arrangements of lines drawn in silver and carbon inks, are the coming thing. It won't be long before most future electronic equipment will be made up in entirety of these circuits. And the unit-nature of these circuits means industry will employ more and more automatic electronic tools. The millenium is here!

COSMIC MAGNET

★ By L. A. BURT ★

THE POWERFUL magnetic field which surrounds the Earth is no illusion, even to the average layman. To the scientist it is a potent, if mysterious, force which can deflect cosmic rays whose energy content may be fifteen billion electron-volts.

Consequently, it has been assumed that the monstrous Sun is an even more powerful magnet. To confirm this belief scientists have noted for a long time, the "Zeeman effect" which simply means that the lines of light from the Sun, as seen in a spectroscope, show a peculiar splitting, a splitting which can be caused on earth by subjecting that light to a strong magnetic field. Ergo, the Sun must have a strong field to do this to its light.

But recently a Dr. Pomerantz of the Bartol Foundation, has succeeded in measuring cosmic rays of a feeble hundred million electron volts, in the Polar regions where the Earth's magnetic field is quite feeble. Therefore, says Dr. Pomerantz, the idea of the Sun having a strong magnetic field is the bunk. If these feeble cosmic rays can creep through the Solar System all the way to Earth, then surely the Sun can't have a powerful magnetic field or it would have deflected them away completely! The "Zeeman effect" needs a new explanation!

☆ ★ ★

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The ICE CREAM TREE

While the older man pointed, the youth stared with wide eyes at the orchard. Was the beautiful tree really there? . . .

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By H. B. Hickey

The stranger spoke of a land where the impossible was a matter of course—like the Tree that didn't really exist!

KARGER wore a self-satisfied air as he wheeled the buggy into the barnyard and unhitched the team. There was no smile on his heavy, lined face as he walked to the house, for he never smiled, but his expression seemed less harsh than usual.

"You sold him!" his wife said from the porch. Her face, as she looked up from the pan of peas she was shelling, was also more than usually pleasant.

"Yeah." He slid a thumb along a gallus. "Durn fool! He opined it was a nice lookin' critter. I agreed it was. He didn't even dicker."

"No!"

"Yeah."

They gazed at each other almost fondly for a second or two, and then Karger went on up the steps and into the house. He paused for a swig of water in the kitchen. Then he looked around searchingly.

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When he was certain he was unobserved, he dug out a small roll of bills and quickly dropped them into a crock. The crock was back on the shelf behind the honey jar in the twinkling of an eye. Then Karger continued through onto the back porch.

His pleased expression vanished. For in the back yard, in the shade of a far flung oak, his six-year-old son and seven-year-old daughter were listening aptly to Girson, the hired man.

Karger moved swiftly. Their first warning of his approach was the shadow he cast as he towered over them. The boy dodged reflexively, although his father had not lifted his hand.

"Johnny! You finished with the henhouse?"

"Yes, father." His clear blue eyes avoided his father's darker ones.

"Sue! What about those pens?"

"I cleaned them."

"You're lying. Both of you."

"Oh, now—" Girson protested.

"They haven't had time to do their jobs."

"Well, perhaps they didn't do them thoroughly—"

"They know how I meant them to do. So they're lying. I won't stand for lying or dishonesty."

"But you sold the horse to your neighbor, Mr. Hennessy."

"How do you—?" Karger glowered at the slender man with the high-domed forehead. "Anyway, what's that got to do with it?"

"Did you tell Mr. Hennessy the horse was windbroke?"

"He didn't exactly ask."

Girson's eyes were a strange golden color and always seemed to be twinkling with humor. "He had a right to assume—"

"I ain't responsible for what he assumes."

Girson shook his head sadly, but his tone remained unargumentative. Even in such a discussion the good humor that bubbled from inside him refused to be quenched.

"You teach your children precepts," he said, "and then set them the opposite example by your deeds. You can't expect them to be honest in a world which is dishonest."

"I suppose it's better wherever you come from?" Karger snorted.

"I know that seems impossible," Girson smiled.

"Then why don't you go back there?" Karger demanded. Then, because the harvest season was coming on and he didn't really want Girson to leave, he said, "It's those fairy tales you tell 'em that teach 'em lies."

He stomped back to the house, muttering to himself.

EVER SINCE Girson had come, Karger had been on the verge of firing him. It wasn't that Girson didn't work well; despite his frail appearance he was tireless, and with animals he was almost uncanny. It was simply that he was utterly impossible, impossible in the true sense of the word.

Even his arrival on the scene had been impossible. He hadn't come down the road, because from their seats on the porch Karger and his wife would have seen him coming. He hadn't come across the fields; there, too, they would have seen him coming.

He had simply appeared. Karger and his wife had looked up and found him standing in the yard.

"No handouts," Karger had growled.

Girson had smiled, an incredible smile, but had said nothing. He'd remained there, a completely foreign object on the native landscape. His golden eyes were not right, neither was his golden skin, unlike any Karger or his wife had ever seen.

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Girson had stood there and listened intently while Karger and his wife discussed the possibility that he was an Indian, a Hindu, a Rooshian. He made no sign that he was offended, or that he even understood what they were talking about. He merely smiled.

Karger rubbed his stubbly chin speculatively. "Could use a man o' work," he muttered. Girson smiled.

"Forty a month and keep," Karger said.

His intonation made it both an offer and a question. This time Girson smiled and nodded his head.

He was accepting the offer. A secret look passed between Karger and his wife. The regular rate of pay in the district was more than double what Karger had hired Girson for.

While Karger's wife fixed some leftovers for Girson to eat, Karger showed him the room he would sleep in and explained Girson's duties. Girson smiled, watching Karger's lips, but still said nothing. Karger considered the possibility that he was mute. But as long as he understood what was wanted that wouldn't be a handicap.

It turned out, the next day, that Girson was not mute. Neither had he understood too well.

Karger had to show him how to milk, how to plow, how to do everything. But Girson learned rapidly; he needed to be shown only once. And he now had a few monosyllables to offer.

He was still impossible. Once he stopped dead still beside Karger in the field and stared up at a couple of hawks wheeling in the sky. He let out a shout of pleased laughter. Karger stared at him.

"Pretty," Girson said, pointing at the hawks. Then he got back to work.

WITH THE children, Girson got along wonderfully. Within two days he was their friend, holding long conversations with them. He spoke with an accent, very soft and musical and strange, but they understood him.

He was often vague, especially when direct questions were put to him. And the children were usually very direct in the queries.

"Are you from Russia?" Johnny wanted to know. "Pa says you are."

"Farther away than that," was Girson's answer. "I couldn't even say the name of my country in English."

"Did you come on a boat?" Sue demanded.

"Why a boat?"

"Ma says Pa must've caught you fresh off of it."

"Oh." Girson's smile was broad. "No, not a boat. More like a machine."

"Like the one you're building in the shed?" Johnny asked.

Girson had asked, after the first few days, for the use of an old and windowless shed. Except for the time he spent working and with the children he was usually in the shed, bolting the door behind him when he entered and padlocking it when he left.

He was always taking inside with him bits of wire, old cans, broken lamp bulbs. And from the noises that emanated from the shed it was apparent that he was making something.

"A little like the machine I'm building," he now agreed.

"Are you going back?"

"I may."

"Well," Johnny pondered, "why did you come here in the first place?"

Girson laughed. "To tell the truth, I didn't exactly intend to come here when I started out."

"You got lost," Sue decided.

"No, the place I was going to got lost," Girson told her.

"How could it?" They were plainly unbelieving.

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"It sometimes happens," Girson assured them. "It's strange, but it does. How would you feel, when we go to town next Saturday, to find it gone?"

He was really very funny, talking like that, and the children had a good laugh. Girson joined them.

"Don't worry," Johnny asserted. "It'll be there."

AND IT was. Girson had his pay in his pocket and they all rode together in the wagon. And when they came around the last turn there was the town before them. Johnny and Sue and Girson laughed about it.

They had a fine time in town, too. Girson paused outside a store to listen to a radio. He turned it around and looked inside, at the works, and his eyes lit up. He dived inside the store.

When he came out he had a small portable radio under his arm. He also had a bag of assorted tubes and wires.

The purchase had taken almost all of Girson's money. But he still had enough left for several ice cream cones for the children and one for himself. With his last twenty cents he bought a ball for them. Riding back home in the wagon, Karger had something to say about that.

"Foolishness. They got to learn money don't grow on trees."

"But it does," Girson told him. "Apples grow on trees and you get money for apples."

"I work hard tending the orchard."

"I'm sure apples grew before orchards were tended," Girson nodded.

"Does money grow on trees where you come from?" Sue wanted to know.

"If you want it to," Girson nodded. "What would you do with the money?"

"Buy peppermint sticks and ice cream."

"Then we simply have trees with peppermint sticks and ice cream cones growing on them."

Karger was sarcastic. "Wouldn't even have to go to town."

"Girson says," Johnny informed him, "that if our farm and town were in his country we could step right out the door and be in town."

Karger glowered at his son. He was getting sick and tired of hearing what Girson said. Especially when it was always such impossible nonsense.

"Sure. And town fifteen miles away," he grunted sourly.

"Fifteen miles if you walk," Girson said.

"Huh?"

"If you walk it takes an hour and a half. But when we ride it takes only half that time. So the distance is also half. And if we rode in an automobile it would be only two and one-half miles."

"If we flew it would be only a mile," Karger added, merely to prove the absurdity of the whole thing.

"Naturally," Girson agreed. "And if we could move fast enough we might find our farm and town in the same place."

"Crazy talk!" Karger shouted. "I won't have no more of it!"

UNFORTUNATELY for Karger's disposition, Girson continued to spin his tall tales. And the children continued to listen to them. Worse yet, they believed them.

"He's stark, ravin' crazy," Karger grumbled to his wife.

"Sure. But the kids don't know that."

"They'll get over it."

"They better. Their teacher sent a note. Says we better learn them that two and two is always four, not six or eight or whatever they want it to-

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be, like some fool's been teaching them."

Karger's face reddened. He got up and went to the bathroom and took his razor strop from its hook. He came back slapping the strop against his palm.

"I'll teach 'em," he muttered. "Two and two will be four, and four more will make eight. And they won't forget it."

It took him but a minute to get the children and lead them, each by an ear, to the kitchen. There was the sound of heavy blows, deliberately laid on. When Karger returned he glowed with righteous satisfaction.

"My father didn't raise no fools or loafers, and neither will I."

And out in the yard Girson comforted the children, patting their heads with gentle hands. After a while they stopped crying and Johnny opened his shirt so Girson could see the welts on his back. For the first time Girson's smile left him.

"Why should a father do that to his child?" he wondered.

"I'll tell you why!" Karger had come up behind him. "Because you fill their heads with foolishness. And I aim to whack it out of them."

"What foolishness?"

"Wha—? Like telling them folks 're put here to enjoy life, not to spend their time working at things they don't like."

"Can't they just do things they enjoy?"

"Maybe where you come from. Not here."

"But why?"

Karger scowled. "Maybe where you come from folks don't whup their kids. But if I was your pa I'd have learned you why."

There was a long silence after Karger left. Girson seemed like a man who was trying to work up a hate but had never learned how. He let out a sigh.

"Didn't your pa ever hit you?" Johnny asked.

"My father couldn't even have imagined hitting me," Girson told him. "Nobody ever struck anyone else."

"Gosh," Sue marveled. "When are you going back, Girson?"

"As soon as I can. Very, very soon, in fact."

"Can we go with you?" Sue wanted to know.

Girson shook his head. "No, that wouldn't be right. You must stay with your father and mother."

"Uh uh," Johnny told him. "I already decided I'm going to run away as soon as I'm old enough."

"And I'm going with him," his sister added.

"No no." Girson was patient, his smile warm and reassuring. "Your father and mother really love you both. It would hurt them if you ran away."

But he was shaking his head as he left them, as though it were as difficult for him to comprehend such things as for them to comprehend a world such as he spoke of. A moment later he was inside the tool shed and the door was shut behind him. There came the sounds of metal striking metal.

AT BREAKFAST the next morning Karger was glum. His dreams had been of thunder and lightning and now there was the feel of a cold rain coming. He bolted his food.

"We'll have to hump," he announced. "Rain ain't gonna wait for us to get that alfalfa in."

Johnny looked up from his plate, his eyes half hopeful.

"If it rains I won't be able to whitewash," he said. "Can Sue and I—?"

"You can scrub those troughs in the barn!" his father snapped. "Rain

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or no, I'll have no lazying around. Hear me?"

He got to his feet and jerked his head at Girson and they went out. Overhead the skies threatened, and Karger worked against time, slamming the horses into the traces, cursing as a cinch buckle slipped.

Girson assisted, working at least as fast, if with greater good humor. Coming out of the yard, their faces felt the touch of raindrops and Karger laid on the whip. Girson made a sound of protest.

"They're used to it," Karger grunted.

By now the sprinkle was a drizzle. A moment later it had turned into a steady chill rain that was whipped on by a rising wind. Karger turned his face upward and spewed forth a string of curses.

"It won't last long," Girson said mildly. He pointed to a strip of lighter sky to the west, from which direction the wind came.

Karger had already given up the whip and now he swung the team around. "Kill half a day—"

"Well, only half a day—"

"It's time. And time is money," Karger told him.

"Time, money. So much concern with them."

"What's more important than money?"

"The warm sun, a soft rain, children, birdsong, the taste of fruit ripe from the tree—"

"Or peppermint sticks ripe from the tree," Karger added sarcastically.

Girson refused to be ruffled. "Anything is possible. In an infinite sequence, in fact, *everything* is possible."

They were by now unhitching the team. Karger patted Girson on the back in a patronizing way.

"You'd be a good man if you'd forget that nonsense," he said. He rubbed his chin thoughtfully and gazed up at the clouds. "Why don't you go and tinker for a while? We'll work later today."

Girson nodded agreeably and started for the shed and Karger laughed aloud. "You about finished with that thing you're making?"

"About."

"Will it fly?"

"Perhaps."

"Will it get us to town before I can say Jack Robinson?"

"I hope so," Girson said, and was gone.

AS IT TURNED out, Girson was wrong about the rain. It lasted longer than he had thought. But when it ended, it did so abruptly and the sun poured down from a sky washed clean. Karger, who had been working moodily about, popped out. His wife appeared on the porch with some old overalls to patch.

"I'll work him a little later today," Karger said. "Stuff'll dry out and a little extra work won't hurt him. Let him tinker a bit yet. Then tell him to take the other team and meet me in the south pasture. And don't wait supper."

He turned the corners of his mouth down even further than usual. "He'll find out what I hired him for, all right."

His wife nodded accord and Karger stamped off across the yard, his righteous mood holding until he had flung the barn door wide. Then he stopped dead still, his face flaming angry disbelief. Instead of being busy with the troughs, Johnny and Sue were whirling through the movements of some strange dance.

"And what might that be?" Karger said ominously.

The children stared at him, at each other, and swallowed drily. "It's a

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dance Girson taught us," Johnny said at last.

"Dance?" Karger snatched up a buggy whip and rushed toward them.

The whip cut at their legs. "I'll teach you to dance! Go ahead, now! Dance! Dance, you shiftless whelps!"

A half hour later, when Girson entered the barn, he found them still sitting on the floor, alternately rubbing their legs and wiping tears from their eyes.

"What's the matter?"

Johnny choked back a sob. "Pa caught us dancing."

Girson started to say something and then stopped in shocked silence, his eyes taking in the raw stripes on their thin legs. For the first time since they had known him he looked angry.

"He did *this?* Your father did *this* to you?"

The tears were flowing openly down Johnny's cheeks and now there was no attempt to hold them back. Girson dropped to his knees and held the children close while they cried it out.

"Take us with you when you go," they begged. "Please, will you? Will you?"

"I might. I just might. But first, help me find a bit of fine wire."

They rose eagerly, rushed about, searched every corner. And at last Sue lifted a thin strand.

"Is this all right?"

"Fine." Girson took it from her. "In fact, perfect. Just what I needed. Now, come along."

An arm about each one's shoulders, he led them to the shed. For the first time they stood close while he unlocked the door. His fingers found a switch and a light clicked on. Their eyes filled with wonder.

"Hurry now," Girson said, and gently pushed them forward.

From the porch their mother watched balefully as the door swung shut behind them. Automatically, her arm dropped and lifted a scrap of blue denim and fitted it over a worn spot in a pair of Karger's overalls. She sewed mechanically.

Above, the sun wheeled further. Above, birds sang. Karger's wife failed to hear them. The sewing went on, finished pieces dropping into a basket beside her as her hand dipped for more work at her other side.

IT WAS well past noon when Karger appeared, lashing his team along at a lathering clip. He wheeled into the yard and leaned out of the wagon.

"Told you to call him," he snarled. "I didn't mean tomorrow."

"I called him. He got the kids and took them in there with him."

"Doing what?"

"Don't know. Some kind of knocking till a while ago. Been quiet since."

"Why didn't you get 'em out of there?"

"They need more'n getting. Figured you'd do a better job."

"I will." Karger was breathing heavily. "Once and for all. Him too. Him and his peppermint sticks and money on trees."

"Foolishness."

"Crazy! Well, I'm going to grow a few lumps on someone. Before I get through with him he's going to tell those kids those stories are nothing but crazy foolishness."

Karger was out of the wagon with a heavy leap. His feet thumped the earth solidly as he strode to the shed. His hand fell on the latch. He shoved. Nothing happened.

"Open up!" he shouted. There was no reply.

He swung toward the porch. "They must've sneaked out!"

"Couldn't have," his wife called.

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She came off the porch toward him. "I been watching the door. Ain't no other place they could get out."

Karger tried the door again, shouted once more. He glared at his wife and took off on a quick round of the small shed. He came back shaking his head.

"They're making out they don't hear," his wife said. "Door's locked from inside, so they must be there."

Karger nodded grimly. He rested his shoulder against the door and shoved. Nothing happened. He stepped back a few feet and drove forward. There was a crack and the door swung in.

His wife came right on his heels. Their eyes swept the small room. It was empty, except for a jumble of wires and tubes and metal that might once have been a large radio.

"Well, they ain't here," Karger said harshly. "They must've got out."

"Couldn't have," his wife said. "Maybe that machine there—"

"Don't *you* start that crazy stuff!" he snarled.

"But I was watching!"

"You weren't watching close enough!"

His eyes were scathing and her own glance dropped. He was right. There was no other reasonable explanation. They weren't here and they couldn't have vanished into thin air. And yet—

Karger was eyeing her suspiciously. "You sure you feel all right?"

She nodded, dropping her eyes again. They widened. Her finger stabbed downward.

"Look!" she gasped.

Karger looked where she was pointing. He bent and lifted something. It was an ice cream cone, partially melted. Green leaves twined about it, forming a calyx at its base. And the base had been broken cleanly, broken at the node from a living stem.

THE FIRST EMISSARY

★ By LESLIE PHELPS ★

THE WIND was a keening wail that whined into the dim Martian day. Esterbrook, Clayton and Swenson stood before the monstrous sandstone monolith and stared at the crack that betrayed the existence of a door in the stupendous structure. The first men on the Martian globe stared with near awe and reverence at this example of a monument to a civilization which must have been a thousand times as old as Man's.

Esterbrook shivered in his pressure-suit, almost as if the knifing cold outside had penetrated—which it hadn't. The cause was much more subtle. Three men at last stood before an example of a non-human's handiwork, the first men to see a Martian dawn.

"I say, chaps, let's get at it, shall we?" he said crisply.

"Right," Clayton, the American said brusquely, "let's go."

Swenson had rigged up an electric hammer. He applied the chisel bit to the crack and touched the stud. The beating throb of the tool carried even through the thin Martian air. The scene was eerie and discomfiting and all three men felt it in their bones. It seemed, in a way, sacrilegious to open this sealed vault. But a thousand thrilled scientists back on Earth insisted over the ultra-wave.

In the lesser gravity Swenson handled the tool skillfully and it's keen alloy edge point bit rapidly into the disintegrating stone. After a few passes of the machine a gouge sufficient to insert a pry-bar was created and Esterbrook and Clayton wedged in a massive pronged hook. Leaning heavily on it, they levered the moderate-sized sandstone block, and crumbling as it came, it fell to their feet. A vigorous attack on other portions of the opening soon gained them across to the interior.

Like grave-robbers entering the tombs of the Pharoahs, the three Martian explorers walked slowly into the darkness, guided by the brilliant beam of an electric torch. Cryptic symbols covered the carven walls, meaningless to the men. There would

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be time for analysis later.

Soon, after a short walk along a descending ramp, a cavernous room was reached, a room lined with the strangest products of a culture far older than their own. Strange tools and utensils, odd shapes and figurines of no perceptible relationship caught their amazed eyes.

"It's unbelievable," Esterbrook breathed. "What a world this must have been!"

Clayton glanced around at the jumbled yet orderly array of exhibits: "Naturally, it's a museum of some kind," he stated matter-of-factly. "What else could such a conglomeration be? We're probably looking at as complete a record of Martian civilization as we'll ever find."

"They don't seem to have had much of a mechanical bend though," Swenson interjected. "You don't see much of metal."

Esterbrook wandered a little away from his companions. Suddenly they heard him swear and then:

"My God!" he gasped, "Oh my God!"

Swenson and Clayton turned and swung their torches toward the object of Esterbrook's surprise. And they nearly dropped them.

Covered with dust, but still clearly recognizable, was a glass cylinder, much like a gigantic test-tube. It was filled with a murky yellow liquid, but the object it sheathed was perfectly detectible.

It was the body of a man and at his side a woman!

Perfectly preserved, frozen in the grotesque masque of death the couple stared unseeingly.

Clayton found his voice at a minute's silence.

"It's a museum, all right," he said bitterly, "a museum that tells us a lot. These people were traveling through space while we were still swinging from the trees."

"It isn't exactly satisfying to think of one's self as a specimen," Esterbrook said with an edged tone.

"I wonder when..." Swenson was saying, "I wonder when..."

★ ★ ★

THE SACRIFICE

★ By JUNE LURIE ★

YOU CAN never in a thousand years, guess where the heroes come from. That arrant coward there, or that blustering fool—each, under the proper circumstances may show that subtle chemical heroism. Such is the way of the gods...

We technicians at Rocket Base Number Three, will never forget that morning when it happened. It happened with such dazzling speed too, that it is somewhat of a blur, even now. But the salient elements are there.

The Sovs threw a war-headed rocket at the base. Auto-radar picked it up. I know that, because I was in Controls when they caught it. I can even remember the startled voice of Blane as he looked at the photo-strip on the scopes, first casually, then with unbelieving astonishment. "They've got us!" he yelled out, "we're pipped two seconds ago!"

And automatically we waited for the blast hoping that the atomic bomb-carrying rocket would possibly be deflected or would explode at such a distance point as to leave us comparatively unharmed. I looked out the window as did a hundred pairs of eyes.

We caught the blinding glare of an exhaust—coming horizontally it seemed—and then the crazy unpredictable rocket skittered to a weird crashing stop. Its eighty foot length smashed and broken, it lay like some wounded monster. Why didn't it go off? Who knows? Something must have happened to its delicate automatic controls, for it simply lay there, an atomic bomb in its nose, waiting, waiting...

Command recognized the situation and over the speakers came the order to abandon the base—and how it must have wrenched Holder's heart to realize that a hundred and fifty million dollars worth of rocket defense was about to be shot to hell.

Then our astonished eyes saw a figure walking across the field toward the bomb. Fenner said in a stupid voice: "It's Loring!" And sure enough it was.

Loring was just a kid, a fair mechanic, but shy and retiring, and mortally afraid of the service. He'd been drafted and stuck here because in private life he'd been a good instrument man. But everyone knew how afraid he was. In fact it was a standing joke his cowardice was. "Loring?—he's afraid of his own shadow," they would say. "We've put him on radar—he wouldn't go near a bomb."

And now this kid walks across five hundred feet of flat field toward a monstrous atomic bomb. He didn't hurry and in his right hand was a standard bag of tools.

Well, the upshot of it all, was that he disarmed the thing! That's what I said; he disarmed the bomb, working cool as a cucumber on something he must have been mortally afraid of. He finished the job and Armaments took over, but not before Loring had gotten some nasty radiation burns.

You can't tell where the heroes come from, I said, and I still say it. Loring is still a mechanic—he didn't go for the hero stuff—but men look at him under a different light. "There's the man who saved Base Three," they'll say. "Quite some guy..."

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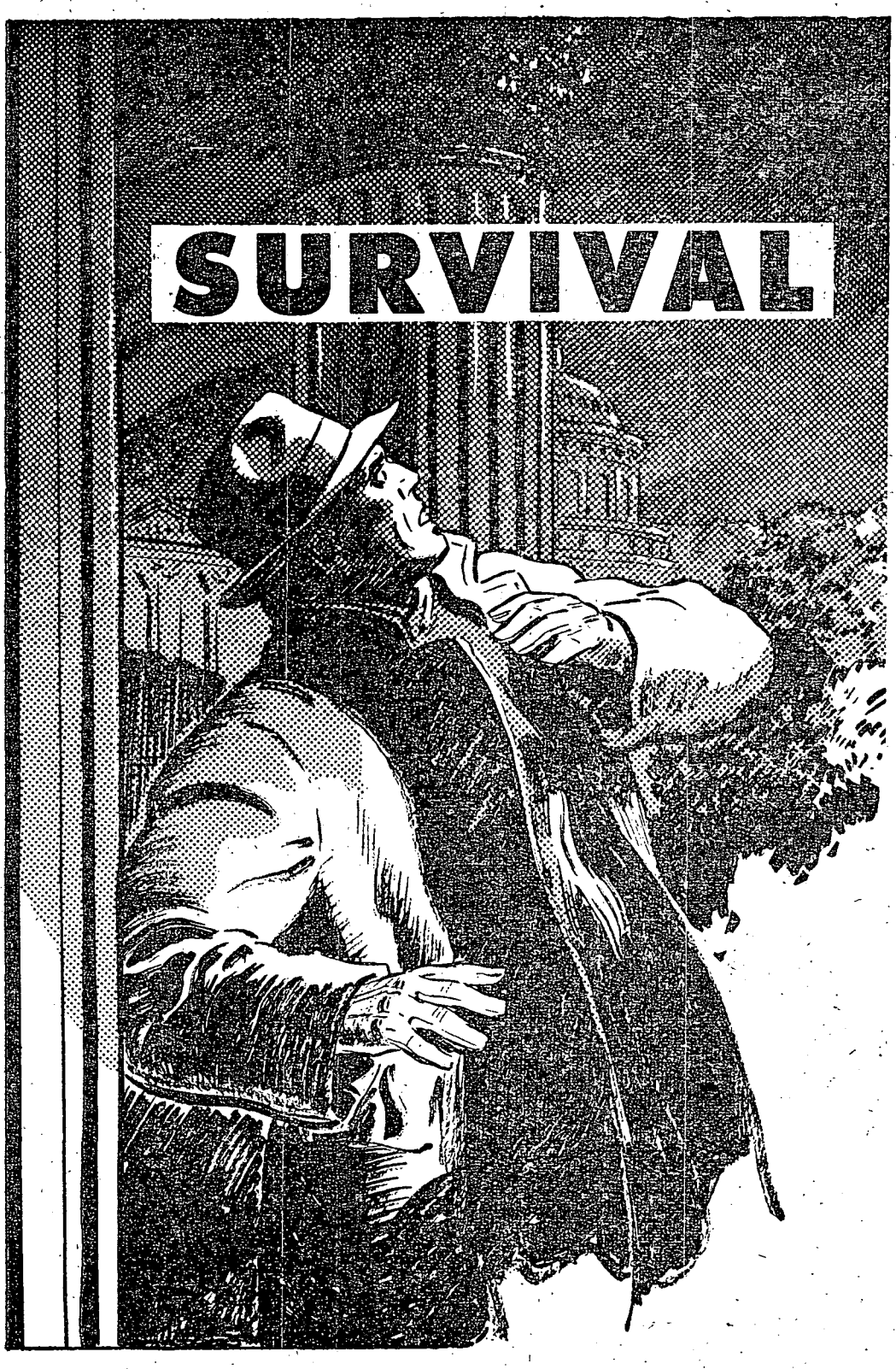

A terrible sense of dread swept over him as the heavenly body blazed across the sky...

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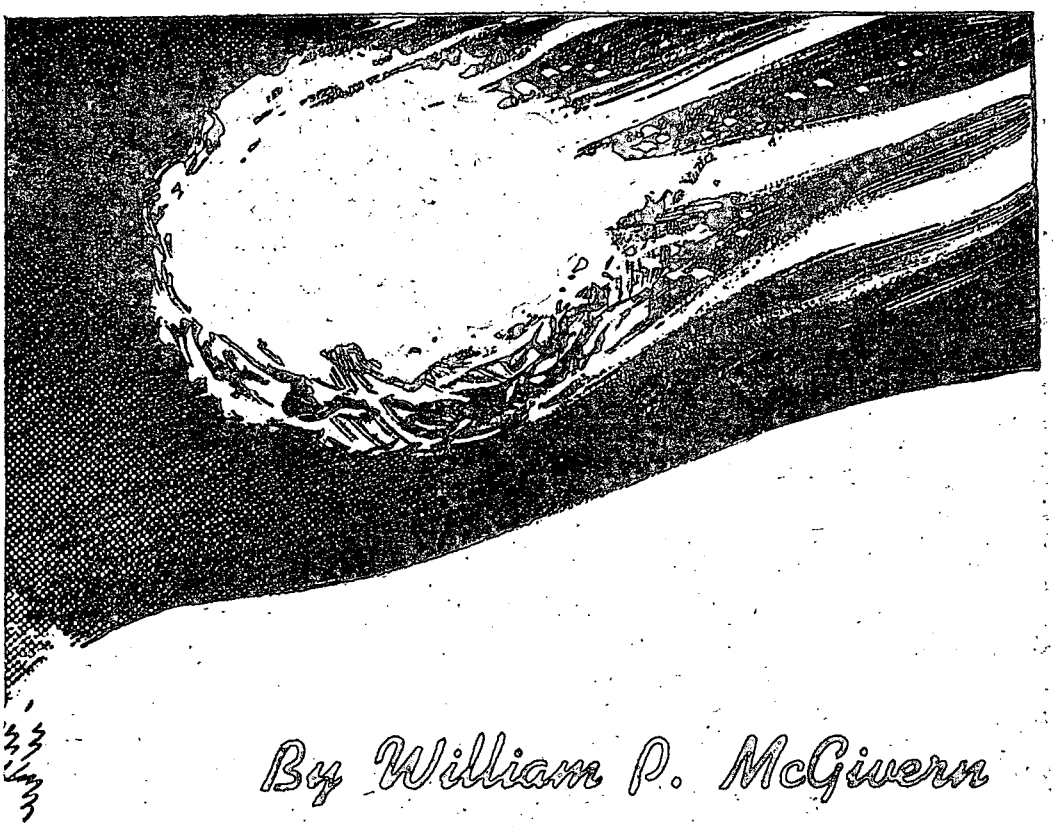

By William P. McGivern

Kirkstar knew that drastic measures had to be effected to save mankind when the Comet struck—but his plan was too perfect!

NO ONE accepted the news at first; except of course the scientists who discovered the comet and a handful of cynical people who regarded the whole idea—the destruction of earth, that is—as a choice and fitting joke.

The rest of the world literally would not believe the awesome truth. They read the first report in screaming headlines, and heard it confirmed sorrowfully by the leaders of all nations; yet the rank-and-file, the man-in-the-street, rejected the news as being preposterous and delirious.

It was treated as a somewhat dubious joke for perhaps forty-eight hours. People waited to be told that it was just a vast hoax; and while waiting smiled nervously at the funny things the radio comedians were saying about the comet.

That was the first stage.

Then the truth was accepted. It could no longer be denied or ignored. The fact was that a saucer-shaped comet, larger than Venus and swinging in an orbit so vast that it would not reappear again for a trillion light years, was going to collide with earth before the year was out. And this was late Spring.

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Newspaper artists presented their readers with a picture of the comet that looked like a giant whirling disc. One paper in the interests of pure grue portrayed it as a spinning buzz-saw—but the unadorned truth was so frightening that any man-made embellishments seemed silly.

When the people finally realized that the world was going to be destroyed they reacted characteristically, that is, to the extent that their usual predilections, prejudices, pressures, convictions and needs were intensified. The religious people rushed to church, debauchees plunged into even more riotous living, the degenerates sought new variations on the theme of sensation, and the weak committed suicide.

There were a great many suicides the first several weeks. The newspapers printed daily tables of the suicides, breaking them down into various categories. Pregnant women were the most greivously affected by the news according to these box-scores, for they led the list day after day. Following them were editors, advertising men, used car dealers, and, oddly enough, television performers.

The tempo of living throughout the world was stepped up tremendously by the realization that the earth and all its people had just about six months left to live.

Marriages reached an all-time high that month; and thousands of businesses were started, shut-up, expanded, or curtailed; partnerships were made and dissolved, as people tried desperately to do the things they'd always wanted to do, to fulfill their dreams.

Monthly magazines switched to weekly production, and the weeklies to dailies, in an attempt to use up their inventories of articles and fiction; and this caused so much confusion that one could occasionaly find features on the end of the world running alongside articles on pension plans.

The normal commerce of the world broke down completely, however. Goods rotted on wharves, or lay stacked in warehouses. Trains and busses ran erratically. No one wanted to spend his last six months working, of course, so nothing got done. People lived frenziedly, frantically, trying to squeeze the last drop of juice from life before it was torn from their hands.

Then, in this nightmare of fear and confusion, a slender ray of hope dawned.

ONE OF THE scientists who discovered the onrushing comet made the cautious comment that the impact would not *necessarily* destroy the earth, and that it was not beyond the bounds of probability to assume that both parts of earth *might* exist and sustain life after the comet had gone on its way.

Interpreted this seemed to mean that there was a chance after all; that while the earth was going to be cut in half, the two parts would still travel about the sun just as before.

Scientists in all parts of the world began figuring away on the backs of envelopes and after a while added a cautious confirmation to their colleague's theory.

Yes, they seemed to agree, given any luck the human race had a fair chance of surviving the collision. The comet would slice through earth on an East-West line, cutting it into two sections. The top, or North section was going to be considerably larger than the bottom, or South section, but people could live on both parts without any trouble.

This news caused great rejoicing.

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The cloud of despair lifted and people danced in the streets and hugged their neighbors in spontaneous outbursts of relief and happiness.

However, when the first giddy excitement faded, it became obvious that the new state of things was going to raise a variety of ticklish problems.

Economically, of course, the world was in for trouble. The splitting of the earth would ruin many airlines, steamship companies, export-import firms and, in short, any business which depended on the flow of commerce between nations. Also, there were knotty social considerations in the new order. Previously one lived on earth because there was no alternative—but now there was a choice. One could plan to live on the North or South half and this caused a lot of worry because no one knew yet which was going to be the smart and sophisticated place to live.

As in any crisis the heads of governments met to mull the issues and increase the tension. The council of nations convened at London and each delegate was armed with the extraordinary power to commit his country to the policy decreed by the majority. This authority was obviously imperative for it is axiomatic in meetings of nations that the graver the issues the less time there is for deliberation.

After two weeks of parliamentary procedure to establish chairmen and committees, the gathering was addressed by a man named Kirkstar—a stocky person with a bullet-shaped head and piercing black eyes. Kirkstar was permanent chairman of the council and hailed from a mid-European country.

Kirkstar said: "The impending catastrophe is a challenge to our courage and integrity. Never in history has such an epochal event occurred; and therefore our decisions must be made without help from the past. I say to you now, bluntly and unequivocally, that the prime concern of this council must be the preservation of the best things of the earth, and that applies to human beings as well as everything else."

This caused a buzz of puzzled comment. What was Kirkstar getting at? Kirkstar didn't keep them in suspense. He silenced the whisperings with an imperiously raised hand.

"We must face this brute fact," Kirkstar said, as his magnetic eyes swept burningly over the great hall. "There are degrees of desirability in men and women. There *are* inferior people. And in courage and strength we must *select* the most desirable people to inhabit one half of the earth and relegate the remaining undesirable people to—"

The last of his words were drowned in a swelling roar of protest from some sections of the auditorium; but the noise died as Kirkstar's gavel rang commandingly.

"I will call upon the chairman of the Analysis sub-committee at this time," Kirkstar said blandly. "Mr. Anthony Margate."

Mr. Margate was a thin blond Englishman with the stooped shoulders and myopic stare of the scholar. He peered closely at his notes for several moments and then lifted his head like a startled crane and began to speak in a dry precise voice.

HE TALKED at great length of industrial potentials, financial ratios, population percentages, and when he eventually sat down one fact emerged in startling clarity from his welter of statistics. The Northern half of Earth was going to be infinitely richer, more abundant, and larger than the Southern section.

Some of the delegates now found

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Kirkstar's point of view quite interesting in the light of Mr. Margate's findings. Kirkstar seemed to be saying that the best people should live on the best section of the planet and that was, all in all, a fairly sound idea.

The delegate from the United States, however, didn't like the proposal at all. He was a tall man in his early forties and his name was Cooper. Addressing the chair after Mr. Margate sat down, he said: "I stand unalterably opposed to any plan which will discriminate against people for such misty reasons as the chairman has set forth."

Kirkstar smiled and said, "We of the council are well aware of the leading position your country has always taken in the race for human rights and equality. However, the present situation cannot be solved with the techniques and attitudes of the past. Individual rights are absurd when the safety of the group is at stake. The group must act for the best interests of the *best* people in this situation, regardless of the fate of any single individual."

The meeting was adjourned amid stormy argument; but at a later session Kirkstar's position was put forward in a motion and carried by an overwhelming majority.

Cooper stormed impotently from the hall for despite his personal feelings America was committed with the rest of the council.

Kirkstar became head of the twelve-man commision which was given the authority to classify all people as either desirable or undesirable and, further, to transport the undesirable ones to the South section of earth. This process, so clean and logical in theory, however, met a thousand difficulties in execution, chiefly because there was no precise, inclusive definition of the term, "undesirable person". Everyone knew vaguely what it meant—that is they felt it applied to someone else. But in particular cases the label often refused to stick.

Two of the things that made a person desirable, according to the definition of the term in the original enactment, were money and property. This was too obvious a point to need explaining, for in an economic society the person without money was obviously lacking in the skills and techniques that were respected in his group. And he was, therefore, undesirable.

This rationale worked excellently with the population in India and Africa and Russia where the poverty was obvious; but the screening teams ran into trouble when they began examining such people as writers, clergymen, musicians, and so forth, most of whom had no property at all and miniscule incomes.

Obviously they were undesirable people financially and whether or not their cultural contribution to the group was enough to counter-balance their lack of money was a moot point. The solution to the problem was made additionally difficult by the fact that such people had the most enormous opinion of their own worth. Kirkstar finally sent down a directive ordering his teams to cease dallying and procrastinating and arguing, and to send low-income types South regardless of their backgrounds or professions. This simplified everything, and hordes of professors, musicians and writers joined the tired streams of humanity that were being herded down into the Southern section of Earth.

The people didn't object to being shoved around like chess pieces, oddly enough, because they were aware that a time of crisis was at hand and that their very lives and freedom were

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in danger. They worried about the comet; they didn't worry about Kirkstar.

The undertaking was so complex that it would have collapsed into utter confusion if hadn't been for the dedicated zeal of Kirkstar and twelve-man commission.

KIRKSTAR was the prime mover. He worked furiously, fanatically, issuing directives, establishing codes of operation, and, chiefly, ferreting out cells of undesirable people. Kirkstar was driven by a cold and beautiful dream that had haunted his sleep since he was a young man. In his dream Kirkstar saw a clean orderly world populated by superior human beings, all living in mindless harmony and enjoying the best fruits of the earth in methodical contentment. Now that dream was becoming a reality. Kirkstar was forging it with his steel-hard soul, breathing life into it with his indomitable will.

Each morning Kirkstar faced deskfuls of charts and graphs, mountains of orders, requests, forms. Standing, he would glare down upon them ferocious ecstacy. There was never enough time, never enough time.

Grabbing up lists of suspected undesirables he would hurl them at an assistant.

"Send them South," he would cry. "And these and these," he would add, shoving additional lists into his assistant's arms.

The world was so full of inferior and undesirable people that Kirkstar occasionally groaned aloud at the magnitude of his task. He could have used an entire lifetime to do the job right, but he had only five months. When this thought came to him he would re-double his efforts in frenzied panic. There just wasn't time! The numbers of people who were undesirable because of pigmentation, for instance, were so great that he might have spent five years on that classification alone. And he had to do it in months! And then there were those who were undesirable because of their attitudes, their convictions, their religions, their illnesses, their appearance—the list was endless.

Kirkstar slept at his desk, worked around the clock, and gradually he began to see improvement here and there. Europe was pretty well cleaned up, and England was in fair shape. India and Africa were fine, of course —all he'd had to do there was move the best people up North, and that had been rather simple.

Kirkstar didn't know it, however, but certain of his twelve-man board did not share his pure enthusiasm for their work.

In fact, they were not above accepting bribes from people who wanted their enemies or business competitors sent South. There was a lot of that sort of thing going on right under Kirkstar's nose but he was too busy looking for undesirable people to notice it. Husbands had their wives sent South in some cases to make room for mistresses; and a Distillery paid a sum of money to have all the prohibitionists shipped away. Certain churchmen were sent off by the racket elements who didn't like religious busybodies stirring up trouble, and, all in all, it was a fine way to eliminate human obstacles.

When Kirkstar found out what was going on he did the only possible thing—he shipped his entire twelve-man board South. He then took over their work in addition to his own—a load which might have killed an ordinary man, but Kirkstar was sustained by his dream of a clean orderly world, unfouled by undersirable and inferior people.

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There was a noticeable tic in his left cheek now as the final days approached. He had made some trying decisions in the last month and that, plus the burden of his work, was taking its toll. There was a bright gleam in his eyes and the muscle in his cheek worked spasmodically as he strode up and down his great office shouting orders at his assistants.

"Send all the Navies South," he shouted. "The Navy is a foolish institution. The Armies as well. They are both neo-Fascist, Autocratic, and Communist by definition. And the Smiths. Send all Smiths South. Why are they hiding under that pale meaningless name? What have they been up to? Send them South."

ASSISTANTS hurried away with these orders and new ones took their places to await Kirkstar's new commands. The process of disposal had become so automatic now that there was only the slightest time-lag between Kirkstar's orders and the accomplished fact. The people who were left in the Northern half of Earth were becoming increasingly jittery. No one could guess who was going next so people kept a bag packed and a satchel of food close by at all times. Some of them went South voluntarily to end the suspense. But not too many. The term "Southie" had become a bitter slur by this time and it was the exceptional person who would deliberately lay himself open to that insult.

Meanwhile, as the time of impact drew near, Kirkstar reached new heights of zeal and industry. He sent away all people with warts, wens, carbuncles, birthmarks, scars, or acne. He dispatched boatloads of atheists, priests, philosophers, free-thinkers, free-lovers, heretics, apostates, agnostics, trancendentalists, and Darwinians. He ordered South all neurotics, schizophrenics, all mother-lovers and father-lovers, all the mal-adjusted and adjusted, everyone with quick tempers or placid dispositions, and all dark-haired chemists.

The cold bright dream was almost reality, and Kirkstar laughed aloud now as he saw in his mind the calm beautiful earth and the superior desirable people who, with him, would enjoy its benefits.

He laughed louder and ordered all his assistants, all his office staff, and all his acquaintances Southward. That done, Kirkstar checked his reports and saw that the hour of impact was approaching. He sighed with relief. The job was done, and without an extra second to spare.

Kirkstar couldn't think of a single undesirable person left in the Northern half of Earth.

And so he hurried out onto the broad steps of his administration building and peered into the Southern sky. There he could see it now, a splinter of spinning light no larger than his hand, rushing toward Earth.

Kirkstar laughed and bobbed his bullet-shaped head. The light in his black eyes gleamed as brightly as the light from the comet. Standing on the steps of the mighty building, Kirkstar glanced about, smiling, looking for the super-creatures he had sifted from the chaff of humanity.

There was no one in sight. The streets stretched away in empty silence. The buildings and homes were deserted.

"Where are my people?" Kirkstar cried out in astonishment.

Above the comet entered the atmosphere of Earth with the sound of roaring fire.

Kirkstar stared up in sudden terror. He knew then what he had done but the implications were too vast to

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understand. There was a mighty sound as the comet struck the earth and Kirkstar was thrown to his knees.

The world was cut cleanly in half and Kirkstar put his forehead on the cold cement and cried out in anguish.

For he knew that he was alone...

THE END

HELL BOMB NO. 1

★ By WALTER LATHROP ★

IT IS suspected that one of the reactions of the "hell-bomb", that hydrogen-helium monstrosity that now casts its shadow over the entire Earth, is a considerable variant of the well-known hydrogen-helium affair. It is a matter of hydrogen reacting with "tritium."

To begin with, Hydrogen is known in three forms, as gases, all alike but with differing atomic weights. These variations are: plain old hydrogen, "aitch-one." deuterium, "aitch-two," and tritium, "aitch-three." The first is an atom with a nucleus consisting of a single proton, the second, one of two protons, and the third, one of three. This latter, appears to be the monster.

While the first two are natural, deuterium occurs in "heavy water," the third of the trip is man-made, compounded in the furious raging of an atomic pile. It promises to be the most devastating.

The whole thing assumes really fantastic proportions now. At first we had the A-bomb, a dreadful horror that has changed the whole world. Close in its footsteps was the simple hydrogen bomb, a giant immensely greater than the A-bomb. This hideous stack is topped off by the even more powerful tritium!

With such power piling up so rapidly, is it possible that Man can avoid, much less deliberately prevent himself from blowing the entire planet into smithereens? It's a good thing we believe in men of good will eventually winning the race. The alternative is intolerable.

In another secluded spot somewhere on this Earth, other men contemplate the same scientific facts through considerably altered perspectives. Do their eyes see the danger with the same intensity as ours? Do they realize that they're playing with Armageddon's flame? Do they know about the creation of a—what's the Russian word for *nova*?...

ZIPPY ZIRCONIUM

★ By SANDY MILLER ★

IN THE ever-expanding search for new materials, the scientists are dragging the Periodic Table for metals whose names formerly have only been mentioned in the textbooks. Among these is the magic zirconium.

Zirconium has been known for a long time. But it's never been considered seriously because it's so difficult to extract from its ores, abundant though they are, constituting the eleventh most common metal on Earth. But the demands for unique properties have forced science to develop methods for producing it.

And one of the major reasons is—you guessed it—rockets!

The lining of rocket tubes and the interior of jet engines is really an engineering headache. The temperatures are so high, the teriffic flowing gases so erosive, that most man-made materials including ceramics and metals, simply can't stand up for long under the high-temperature abuse. But in a compound of zirconium and boron, called zirconium boride, scientists think they've found a promising material. This stuff can take temperatures of better than six thousand degrees!

If anybody ever builds an atomic-powered rocket, he's going to need a refractory substance like this. The U.S. Navy which is struggling with the atomic propulsion of ships, is tremendously intrigued by the properties of zirconium.

While the other properties of zirconium are interesting, it is primarily as a rocket lining material that we're at present interested in it. In most rocket work it has been learned that the temperatures usually run around five or six thousand degrees. No known substances seem to stand up as well as zirconium.

Zirconium can be used in the construction of a brilliant arc lamp. Strike an arc between zirconium electrodes and the tips which are molten, glow with a brilliance about one-eighth that of the sun's surface. This will be very useful in photography, TV and film projection.

Keep your eye on zirconium. It's going to be known soon. It's extremely resistant to most chemical corrosion, so utensils of one kind or another will be made.

★ ★ ★

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By Robert Bloch

HAVE YOU EVER been desperate for a meal? Willing to do anything for food? Well, I was. And so I went to Jack's Shack to eat. You can see how starved I was to risk a dinner at Jack's Shack. Because as a cook, Jack takes up where the Borgia family left off.

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END of YOUR ROPE

Any time you get the urge to pick on a Hindu, remember that he knows how to use a rope as more than just a lethal necktie!

I knew in that moment that I had underestimated the Hindu—and it might prove fatal.

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But I did it. Ordered a chicken dinner and actually ate it. I was just banging my way through the drumsticks when I heard a cackle. This didn't surprise me—from the toughness of the chicken I could easily believe it was still alive.

Then the cackle came again. I wiped the gravy out of my eyes and looked up.

Sure enough. There he was—the tall man with the tall tales—Lefty Feep. In person, and in a new suit, as usual. A very glad plaid, in an orange and green combination which matched his yellow tie, purple shirt, and the blue circles under his eyes. Sometimes, when I see Feep I wish I were color-blind. And after he starts talking, I'd just as soon be deaf, too. Heaven knows I'm already dumb—from listening to him.

But there was Lefty Feep, and I had to make the best of it.

"Hi, Bob, what's with the mob?" he greeted me.

"Sit down," I invited. "I'm just finishing dinner."

"Is that a chicken you are picking?" he asked.

"It must be—it's too small for a vulture," I answered. "Here, how about a wing?"

"A wing?" Lefty Feep's voice rose with his eyebrows. "A wing is not the thing!'

"What's the matter, aren't you hungry?"

"Absolutely. But please—no wings!"

"What's the trouble?" I persisted. "Don't you like chicken wings?"

"It is not that I do not like wings—I merely hate them," Feep explained. "Every time I think of them I think of Arthur Arthur. And every time I think of Arthur Arthur I think of a rope. And every time I think of a rope I get ready to hang myself."

"Why, what happened?"

I ought to have known better than to ask that question. Lefty Feep leaned across the table and shook a wishbone in my face.

"It is a very gory story," he whispered. "It is a tale to make you pale and quail without fail. A narration of damnation."

"Some other time, Lefty," I said, hastily. "Right now I'm all tied up. I'm at the end of my rope."

"You are at the end of your rope? Wait until you hear about the rope my pal is at the end of."

"Later," I pleaded. "I have a heavy date."

"Tell her to reduce," snapped Lefty Feep. "You must hear about what happens to my pal."

"Must I?" I said.

And then, as Lefty Feep pushed me back into the seat and held me firmly in place with both hands, I knew that I must.

Lefty Feep opened up his mouth, I opened up my ears, and the story came.

THE OTHER day I suddenly wake up with a terrific craving to have some fruit. So naturally, when I get dressed I head down the street to a tavern. There is naturally no better place to find the fruit I crave—such as the cherries at the bottom of Manhattans and the lemons on the side of Tom Collins. Otherwise I seldom go into a tavern, unless, of course, I want a drink.

Any kind of how, there I am in this alcohol hall, just stepping up to the bar, when I spot an old pal of mine. To be exact, he spots me—with a couple drops from the drink he is holding in trembling fingers.

"Why, hello Arthur," I say, surprised.

"Well cut off my allowance and call me broke, if it ain't Lefty Feep!" bawls this personality. "Have a drink,

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fink! Come on, pal."

I take a not so good look at my pal Arthur and see that he is not exactly over on the alkaline side. He is, to be candid, at least three sheets and a pillowcase in the wind.

The bartender evidently agrees with me, because he suddenly leans over and taps Arthur on the shoulder.

"Arthur," he says, "why don't youse go home? Youse is drunk."

"Give me another drink," Arthur insists.

The bartender shrugs. "Lissen, my boy," he says, "why do youse get drunk, anyway?"

Arthur sneers. "You put twelve scotches in front of me and then you ask why I get drunk?" he shrieks, sarcastically. "You might as well cut off my head and ask me why I'm bleeding."

I stick my tongue out at the discussion.

"Arthur," I tell him, "the bartender is right. You're a good newspaper reporter, aren't you? Why waste your time hanging around taverns? You look like a bar rag."

"I have two reasons," Arthur sighs. "The first is my name. Arthur Arthur! There's a name for you. Arthur Arthur! With a name like that I should live in Walla Walla and eat tutti-frutti until I get shot by a dum-dum bullet! I hate my name, but every day I have to see it all over a newspaper as the byline of the stories I write."

"But you write good stories for the papers," I console him.

"I am coming to that," moans Arthur Arthur. "My second reason. I have pretty good luck for a while—lots of accidents, drownings, murders—all that a man could ask for. But what happens this week? Nothing! Not even a teensy-weensy little axe slaying! I tell you, the peace and quiet around this town makes me sick."

He stares at me. "Give me a torso!" he pleads. "Just a single torso! Stick a few knives in it. Wrap it in brown paper and leave it at the railroad station for the cops to find it. That's all I ask!"

"I am sorry, Arthur," I tell him, "I am very sorry, but I do not have a spare torso."

Arthur Arthur ignores me and blobbers on.

"This morning my editor gives me an assignment to go down and meet a customer arriving on the *S.S. Leukemia* or some such boat. This customer is some kind of Hindu fakir on his way to confer with Einstein about the theory of relativity.

"Just imagine! Me, a crack feature writer, getting such an assignment! I am not meeting Paulette Goddard, either. This Hindu will show plenty of limb, but he won't be any Marlene Dietrich. Can you figure me picking up some little brown midget in a bath towel and jabbering to him in good old Bronx Hindustani?"

Arthur Arthur takes another drink. I pat his shoulder.

"You shouldn't be so sensitive, my boy," I tell him.

"All artists are sensitive," grunts Arthur Arthur. "Give me a good murder!"

"There, there. Maybe you will get a murder tomorrow," I console him. "We can't all have murders whenever we want them, see?"

"Well, I want one now," insists Arthur Arthur. "You don't know how it is with me. I got to have one."

"Listen," I squawk. "Don't be childish. You and your murders! Why not go down to the boat and get this thing over with? You don't want to get thrown out on your assignment."

"Maybe—" says Arthur Arthur.

"I know it hurts your professional pride," I coax, "but we all have our

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ups and downs. A Hindu today, but who knows? Maybe a great big passion slaying for you tomorrow."

"All right," says Arthur Arthur, "I'll do it. Call me a taxi."

"You're a taxi," I tell him. But bum gags aside, Arthur Arthur calls a cab and then sails out of the joint for his interview.

THE REST of the story I get later from him, but I will carry on from here.

Arthur Arthur drives down to the dock and flashes his press card. He goes up the gangplank of the ship and asks a steward for directions.

"Where," he inquires, "can I find Omar Khayyamer?"

The steward gives him a dirty look and then a cabin number on another deck. Arthur Arthur plods up to the stateroom. He stands in front of the door. Here it is now. A meeting with a little Gandhi in triangle trousers. Oh well!

The door opens. A tall drip in evening clothes smiles out. He has straight dark hair and grey eyes. Perhaps he is the butler.

"Pardon me," pipes Arthur. "I'm looking for Omar Khayyamer."

"Don't look any further," says the tall drip.

"But I'm a reporter—I'm here for an interview—I must see him."

"Well, take a good look, then."

"You mean, you're the swami, the Hindu whatchamacallit?"

"I'm not Andy Hardy," says the guy.

"But you speak English and you don't look like a Hindu," objects Arthur Arthur.

"Come in and sit down," says Omar Khayyamer.

So in goes Arthur and down he sits, still staring at the good-looking man in evening clothes.

"Say," he mumbles, "I'm pretty sorry I doubt your word. My name is Arthur Arthur, and I want an interview—"

"And probably a drink," suggests Omar, smiling. "Will scotch do?"

"Always does."

So they drink.

"I want to explain why I am so skeptical," Arthur says. "I expect to meet some old skinny dried-up guy with a pair of diapers on. I figure he will keep a goat in the room, or something."

"Sorry to disappoint you," says Omar. "But I suppose I could buy a goat."

"Where?"

"Why almost anywhere. I'm a stanger here, but maybe you could help me."

"Now you're kidding me, Mr. Khayyamer."

"Just call me Butch."

"Butch?"

"They do at Cambridge." Omar smiles. "Yes, and at Oxford and the Sorbonne too. I'm afraid I'm not a very picturesque figure for a Hindu swami. Too civilized for a good story. I'm just in this country to interview Einstein and discuss certain mathematical formulae and postulates. It's all here in the briefcase, but it won't interest your editor and readers."

Omar points at a little dark case on the table.

Arthur sighs. "Too bad," he remarks. "I was kind of hoping for a little excitement."

Just as he asks for it, he gets it.

All at once a terrific series of revolver shots rattles through the walls from the next stateroom.

Arthur jumps to his feet like he is being shot out of an invisible cannon.

But quick as he is, Omar is quicker.

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He runs to the door connecting with the other stateroom. He tugs at it. It is locked. Then Omar smiles and holds out his hands.

He walks *through* the door!

Maybe it is an illusion or maybe it is the scotch, but Arthur Arthur gasps. He runs over to the door and tugs it. This time it opens fast. So fast that Arthur can't figure out whether he just sees a mirage or not.

All he knows is that he is standing in the stateroom doorway and watching a very active scene.

There are four men in the room. Three of them are very busy. The fourth man is very dead.

He lies on the floor, and standing over him is a bearded big guy, holding a smoking revolver.

This shocks Arthur not a little, because there is a sign on the wall which definitely says NO SMOKING.

The other two bearded men are pulling out drawers and peering under the mattress, looking for something.

They are not exactly expecting to see swami Omar and Arthur coming in on them so suddenly. So they are startled for a moment.

Then they turn on the heat. The guy with the gun jumps.

Two bullets sing a merry tune over Arthur's head.

The other two lugs have no guns, so they just point their beards at the swami Omar and then dive for him in a flying tackle.

Arthur Arthur dives on the bed.

When he does, he trips over the carpet on the floor. He lies there, expecting any minute to feel a bullet in his back, or what he has sticking out from under the bedclothes in place of his back.

But nothing happens. He turns around and sees the guy with the gun bending down where the carpet is turned over. He is grabbing what lies underneath it. A briefcase.

MEANWHILE the swami Omar is pretzel-bending the two hoods who tackle him. He has them both tied into knots, and his bright eyes sparkle when he notices the third guy picking up the briefcase he finds.

"Arthur," yells Omar. "Quick—get that briefcase!"

Arthur Arthur does a very brave thing. He actually obeys Omar and charges down on the guy with the briefcase. He snatches it and runs back into the swami's stateroom.

The bearded guy with the gun chases after him. And Arthur Arthur, crossing into the other stateroom, trips again. He feels the big lug bearing down on him. He feels the iron butt of the revolver crack his head.

And then he feels from nothing. Arthur Arthur definitely gets deprived of his consciousness. He is knocked very far out.

When he wakes up he is sitting on the floor of swami Omar's stateroom. Omar is bending over him. Arthur sits up. His hand trembles. Omar puts the scotch bottle in it.

"What happens?" Arthur asks, between gulps.

The swami shakes his head. "They depart with the briefcase," he explains. "Fortunately, they do not make a mistake and take mine."

"But who are they?" asks Arthur Arthur.

"Enemy agents, I believe. Evidently they follow our friend next door across the ocean in order to gain possession of his brief-case. And they want it enough to turn him into our *late* friend.

"When you get knocked out I come in here on the run, but the man with the gun skips out the door with the briefcase. Meanwhile my two playmates also vanish from the other cab-

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in. Now that place is filled with reporters, police, and all the other parasites that come to prey on the bodies of the dead."

Arthur Arthur hears a pounding outside the swami Omar's door. Omar also listens.

"Arthur," he whispers, "you must help me get out of here. I don't want to run into a lot of publicity—it will be a poor reflection on my forthcoming visit with Einstein. How can we get away unobserved?"

Arthut Arthur smiles. "Why don't you just walk through the solid door like you do before?"

Omar sighs. "You notice that, do you?" he murmurs. "Well, I'll have to explain about it later. But how can we get out now?"

Arthur strolls over to the stateroom door and opens it a crack. He sticks out his arm and jerks two white-coated stewards into the room. The stewards start to yell, but Arthur knows from experience that the best way to gag a man is to stuff dollar bills down his throat. So in a few minutes the stewards consent to take off their white jackets and give them to Arthur and Omar.

"Come on," says Arthur. "Out we go, and don't say a word."

When they reach the door Omar turns around.

"I nearly forgot my briefcase!" he yells. He picks it up from the floor where it falls in the excitement, and they elbow their way out, disguised as stewards.

Passengers and boat officials collar them.

"Who's in there? What are the cops doing? Do you see that Hindu guy?"

Arthur Arthur smiles. "I don't know anything," he says. "I just go in to change the bath towels." Then he dives through the mob, pulling Omar after him. They get down the gangplank and into a taxi.

"Where are we going?" asks Omar.

"Some place where I can get an exclusive story from you on all this," Arthur tells him. "That's what I am sent out to do by my editor."

"But I don't want to go to a newspaper office," objects the swami Omar.

"Who says anything about an office?" Arthur comes back. "We are going to a cafe and relax. There is nothing I rather do than sit back and relax on my expense account. It is very comfortable, being padded."

Sure enough, Arthur takes Omar to a very classy night spot. Nothing less than the Herring Room of the Bismark Hotel.

A blast of elegant perfume hits them as they enter.

"Ah," sighs Arthur, recognizing it with delight. "Gin!"

THEY DOFF their hats to the check-room girl and then go out on the dance-floor where people are scraping shins to the orchestra tooting of Blue Serge and his Musical Mothballs.

"Very elegant and impressive," breathes Omar, staring around at the host of gay, sophisticated celebrities from Nebraska and Oklahoma.

They take a table. The waiter ambles over.

"One scotch," Arthur orders.

"One scotch for two gentlemen?" sneers the waiter.

"One bottle of scotch, dummy!" yells Arthur Arthur.

One bottle of scotch it is, and it does strange things to both of them.

"Now what about this trick of walking through doors?" asks Arthur, a couple of drinks later. "Are you one of these Hindu mystics? One of those guys that uses a bed of nails for a sofa and eats butterflies?"

Omar smiles. "I pick up a little occult ability, yes," he admits. "It is just a case of mind over matter. And

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speaking of matter—can't we order some food?"

"Wait a minute," suggests Arthur Arthur. "Let me take a squint at the bill so far. This is one of the biggest gyp joints in town."

Arthur calls the sneering waiter and takes a look at the bill. He whispers to swami Omar. "Cover charge—$15. Service charge—$10. Scotch—$10."

He turns to the waiter who is ready to take an order.

"Bring us a couple glasses of water," he says.

The waiter sneers again, but he brings them the water and a very dirty look.

"Too bad," whispers Arthur to Omar. "Me taking you to such a place. We can only afford water now on my expense account."

The swami Omar smiles at Arthur. Then he smiles at the waiter, who is still standing around hoping to give these two dead-beats the bum's rush.

The waiter doesn't like to see Omar smile. But there is something else he does not like to see either. Because Omar suddenly waves his hand over the glass of water and the water disappears. Instead something yellow and bubbling takes its place.

Then Omar does the same pass over Arthur's glass. Same result.

"Have some champagne," Omar suggests.

Arthur has some champagne.

The waiter had a fit.

Omar smiles up at him, winking at Arthur Arthur on the sly. "Now about that food," he says. "I'm still hungry."

He turns to the wall. There is a potted plant sitting there for decoration. Omar just reaches out and begins to pluck fruit from the fern. He gets grapes, bananas, peaches, oranges, and cherries.

The waiter gets convulsions.

All at once a pineapple appears in Omar's hand.

"I don't order this—take it back!" Omar yells at empty air. The pineapple disappears.

So does the color from the waiter's face.

Then Omar turns to the waiter very politely. "Have a banana?" he urges.

The waiter finds his voice. "I don't want no banana," he gasps. "Youse is a witch!"

He scuttles off. Omar smiles and peels an orange.

"How do you do it?" Arthur Arthur marvels.

"Simple for a *yogi* adept," Omar explains. "I know the planes and angles. Planes and angles seem to divide matter into far separate physical entities, when in reality all corporeal structure is homogenous."

"The hell you beller!" remarks Arthur Arthur.

"Now take this fruit. It's real, isn't it? Just as real as the fern which is standing here all the time. The only trick is to make the fruit appear on the fern. Merely a matter of conjunction. Proper understanding of the physical laws behind metaphysics does the trick. Planes and angles, that's all."

BUT ARTHUR ARTHUR is not listening. He is looking at the planes and angles exhibited by two young damsels who now stand before the table.

One of these damsels is a redhead. Her hair is so vivid that all she needs is roller skates to look like hell on wheels.

The other tomato is a blonde, athletic type. The kind that can run the gamut of emotions and still be plenty speedy.

Arthur Arthur, being a gentleman, knows what to do when two unescorted young ladies appear on the scene.

"Hello, babe," he says, politely.

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The blonde damsel, also very polite, sits down in his lap. The redhead drapes herself around Omar.

"What a pleasant American custom," he remarks, pulling two more glasses out of nowhere and snapping his fingers. A bottle of champagne thumps down on the table.

"Who throws that?" asks the blonde, looking up.

"It comes out of nowhere," says the redhead, with a puzzled look.

"But it's right here," Arthur Arthur grins, filling up the glasses.

"Do you do this?" the redhead persists, looking at Omar. "Are you some kind of a magician or such?"

"That's right," Arthur breaks in. "We are both magicians. He's the kind that makes the drinks appear. I am the kind that makes them disappear." And he swallows very quickly.

"Why what have you got here?" asks the redhead, picking up Omar's briefcase and beginning to open it.

"Put that down!" Omar yells. The redhead giggles and puts it down.

But Arthur Arthur notices her glance off to another table and wink.

He looks at that table on the other side of the room. Looks and sees the three bearded men who have the fight in the stateroom!

Arthur turns to Omar. "Grab that briefcase!" he yells. "These dames are sent here by those crooks from the boat!"

But he warns too late. The redhead jumps up, running with the briefcase. Meanwhile the blonde pulls out another briefcase from under her evening wrap and slaps it on the table.

"Fair exchange is no robbery," she mutters, then beats it after her friend. The three bearded bozos are waiting for the girls at the end of the room.

All at once Omar stands up. He stretches out his hands and makes history in the Herring Room. The Herring Room served a lot of bad liquor in its time and not a few Mickey Finns, but this is the first evening when all the customers see snakes at once.

And that is exactly what they see when Omar stretches out his pinkies.

Directly in front of the two fleeing damsels, little wiggling green crawlers appear. They slither around the ankles of the dancers and make unpleasant sounds. So do the dancers.

"Snakes!" yells the redhead. She turns around and runs back to the table. Arthur intercepts her pass and grabs the briefcase again. Now he and Omar have two briefcases.

The customers have snakes and hysterics. They are running to and fro, and the ones that run to, bump into the ones that run fro.

Arthur notices that the biggest of the three beards is pulling out a revolver again. It seems to be a habit with him.

"This is where we come in!" he yells to Omar.

They hold the briefcases very tightly and plunge towards an exit. A path is opened up by a whistling bullet scooting overhead. They use the path. The beards chase after them out the door.

"Taxi!" yells Arthur Arthur, hitting the street. They hurl into a waiting cab.

"Where to, buddy?" asks the driver.

"Anywhere that's the hell out of here!" screams Arthur.

IN THE nick of time they whizz away. Behind them the bearded bozos jump up and down on the pavement.

"What is all this?" Arthur asks Omar, shivering against the cab seat.

"Evidently our friends make a mistake this afternoon," Omar explains.

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"In the haste of their escape they take my briefcase instead of the one they are searching for. When they discover this, they trail us to the Herring Room and get the girls to try and switch briefcases again."

"Must be something pretty important in that briefcase to take all these chances," Arthur suggests.

The swami Omar nods. He opens the zipper of the second case, then whistles. "Naval plans!" he murmurs. "No wonder. They are spies, all right."

"And what's in your own briefcase?" asks Arthur.

"Something even more important, that I wish to show to Professor Einstein," Omar tells him.

Suddenly the cab stops.

Arthur blinks. "Say, where are we?" he mumbles.

The cab driver sticks his nose around. "From the tenor of your remarks," he says, "I infer that youse wish to visit another jernt."

Sure enough, they are parked in front of a little dingy tavern way out in the sticks.

Omar shrugs. "Might as well go in," he suggests. "This place looks quiet. You and I must decide what to do about all this."

They pay the driver and go into a very ordinary-looking little bar-room. It is quite deserted. There is a balcony and stairway in back.

The only personality in the joint is a little bartender with an outsize schnozz.

"Evening, gents," he d r a w l s. "What's it gonna be?"

They order scotch and sit at a table, eyeing the two briefcases.

"Now what to do about all this?" Arthur begins.

His question is answered for him right away.

Because the door of the tavern opens very quickly. Then it shuts and locks very quickly. And the three bearded bozos are in the tavern.

"So!" gasps Arthur Arthur. "That cab driver—"

But there is no time for conversation. The biggest beard is already doing his usual trick—pulling out the revolver.

The swami grabs his briefcase. The other one lies on the table, but Arthur Arthur does not stop to pick it up. He races for the balcony stairs after the swami.

The three spies charge them. When Omar gets to the head of the stairs he turns. He yanks out at the rails and wrenches the wooden steps loose. They crash to the floor.

Arthur and the swami Omar stand on the balcony. The three whiskers stand below. A gun barks.

Arthur ducks down. But the bullet doesn't even come close. It hits—of all things—the tavern chandelier. The lights go out.

Arthur and Omar peer into the darkness. Down below the spies are lighting matches, fumbling at the briefcase on the table.

"It's the wrong one, by Gar!" comes a thick voice. "We got to get upstairs somehow."

Then Omar does a very surprising thing. He walks to the edge of the balcony and calls down at them.

"Gentlemen—you will find a rope in my briefcase. Throw it up here and I will tie it to the balcony rail. Then you can climb up and get your briefcase."

One of the beards calls back.

"What kind of trick are you making with us? Why do you change your mind?"

"What else can I do?" answers Omar. "I don't think the briefcase is worth the cost of my life. We'll make a bargain. If you climb up on a rope

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you can't shoot me. I will give you the briefcase and we will go our separate ways and forget the whole thing."

They go into a huddle downstairs. Finally the voice calls out again.

"We agree. I've got the rope from your briefcase. Here it comes."

THERE IS a swish and a thump, and the rope lands across the balcony rail. Omar's hands do things to the rope in the darkness.

"Are you selling out to these crooks?" Arthur whispers.

"This is the only way," Omar tells him. He calls over the edge of the balcony. "Ready, now?"

Arthur can hear grunting as the bearded man climbs up the rope. Then the grunting dies away.

A voice comes from below. "Are you safe up there, Peter?"

"Quite safe."

But it is swami Omar who speaks. The man on the rope says nothing.

"You two come up now," Omar says, in a deep voice.

Arthur Arthur blinks in the dark as he hears the other two men climbing the rope. But where is the first man?

Suddenly the climbing and breathing sounds are gone.

And Omar laughs.

"See that?" he chuckles. "All three of them climb the rope."

"What is all this?" asks Arthur.

Omar reaches into his pocket and pulls out a flashlight. He plays it on the rope. A most peculiar rope.

It is not tied to the balcony at all. It just stands straight up in the air.

There are no three spies on it. There isn't even one spy.

On top of that, there is no top on the rope. No visible top. It just stands straight in the air and seems to go up into a kind of grayish cloud and fade away.

"What?" gulps Arthur Arthur, taking this all in.

"This is what I have in my briefcase," Omar answers. "What I intend to take and show Professor Einstein."

"But—"

"It's the old Hindu rope trick!" explains Omar. "I just trick our three friends into climbing up a rope which makes them disappear into nowhere."

He smiles at Arthur Arthur. "This is the kind of thing you westerners refuse to believe. Now you can tell your editor you see it happen with your own eyes. And that's that. Now we will climb down, take the rope, and then take this briefcase with the naval plans along to the authorities."

Omar glances down at the floor of the balcony where the briefcase is. Only it isn't, any more.

"I am robbed!" yells Omar. "One of those dogs must reach out when he passes the balcony level here and grab the briefcase. Now they've got it up there with them."

He faces Arthur Arthur with a slow stare.

"Those papers are very important," he says. "We must get them back."

"How?"

"Arthur, there is just one thing to do. You must climb up that rope and get back the second briefcase."

Arthur shudders. "Not on your life. I'm not going to be roped into climbing that thing!"

"But you must!"

"Why not climb up and get it yourself?"

"If I do, how would you get me down?" asks Omar.

"If I do, how would you get me down?" Arthur snaps back.

"Leave that to me," says swami Omar.

Arthur Arthur eyes the dangling

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rope. It is thick and brown, and it stands straight up in the air from the floor below. He can see every strand and thread in it, but when he stares up the rope just blurs off into nothing.

"Just what is up there?" he asks Omar.

Omar shrugs. "That is what I intend to discuss with Einstein," he says. "This rope is woven by the holy contemplants in the temple where I study metaphysics. Every strand is a prayer to the Infinite. All I know is that the rope is a link with that part of existence beyond our five senses. According to the theories of Einstein and the physicists, it could be a gateway to the Fourth Dimension."

Arthur shakes his head. "What you are giving me is not exactly a road map," he says.

"Why not climb up and find out?" the swami Omar coaxes. "I think beyond that rope lies the realm of what we call Imagination. It is from here that I get the champagne and the fruit and the serpents that apparently come from nowhere. I imagine them and they come from Imagination to existence. That is all I know. The rest is up to you."

"Up to me?"

"Yes. Up the rope, which you will climb. You will find the three spies and get back the briefcase."

"I rather be hanged with your lousy rope than climb it," screams Arthur Arthur, passionately.

BUT OMAR steps forward suddenly. His hands shove out. Arthur Arthur topples backwards across the balcony rail. He tumbles, grabs empty air. Grabs the rope.

He hangs there. Then, with a groan, he tries to slide down. But he can't! The rope tangles up under his feet in invisible knots.

Still groaning, he climbs up. He sticks out his hands pleading to Omar, like an organ-grinder's monkey asking for pennies.

But Omar shakes his head. "Good luck!" he calls out. "I suggest that wherever you go, you stick close to the rope at all times."

Arthur Arthur climbs a few feet more without knowing it. And then the rope seems to move of its own accord beneath his hands. The swami's voice gets very faint and far away. The world turns to a gray mist, like the mist at the top of the rope.

And all at once Arthur feels himself shooting up—up through a ceiling that isn't there, through a sky that doesn't exist, and into the world beyond.

He stops in the middle of a cloudy plain. Nothing but mist all around him. He seems to be standing on something, but he can't see it. He seems to be holding the rope with one hand, but he can't see it. Looking down, he can't even see himself!

He can't see his own feet or his own hands!

Arthur closes his eyes and shudders. But there is nothing to shudder, because his body appears to disappear.

Only his mind is left. Omar is probably right. This is a world of pure Imagination.

There is nothing to rely on but his thoughts.

That's it! Maybe if he *thinks* of his body, he will see it! Arthur imagines himself. And sure enough, looking down, there he is. Right in the middle of the mist.

It is too much for Arthur Arthur. "I need a drink!" he thinks.

Sure enough, out of the mist comes a glass of scotch. Just like it does

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for swami Omar back on earth.

Arthur can see it. And he certainly can drink it.

Then he feels better. All at once he remembers his mission up here—somewhere there must be the three bearded bozos with the briefcase. But where? Where in this mist?

And how can he find them?

Then he thinks of it. He merely has to *imagine* that they are standing right next to him.

He imagines.

Nothing happens.

Then he remembers he forgets to think of them as being *visible.*

So he does. And there, standing on little clouds of mist at his left, are the three spies.

But without any briefcase!

Arthur remembers he must imagine the briefcase, too.

And there it is, in the leader's hand.

Here is where Arthur makes his mistake. "Hey!" he yells out, "throw that briefcase over to me!"

The bearded leader shakes his head.

"All right then," says Arthur Arthur. "I can *think* that you give me the briefcase."

Suddenly a gleam appears in the biggest beard's eye.

He catches on.

In two seconds Arthur suddenly plunges head over heels into space, falling down into the depths of the mist. A wind screams in his ears.

"He *thinks* I am falling," Arthur realizes. He closes his own eyes and concentrates hard.

"I've got wings— I can't fall," he imagines.

Sure enough, a thump knocks against his shoulder blades. He stops falling and begins to flap. Looking around, he sees a lovely pair of white wings on his shoulders.

He flies back to the cloud of mist.

THE THREE are standing just as he leaves them. Quickly, Arthur Arthur imagines that the leader throws him the briefcase.

And the briefcase sails for his arms.

Then the leader's eyes glitter again.

Arthur Arthur stretches out his arms to catch the briefcase. But it is not a briefcase that dives for his arms. It is a snarling lion!

Crazy like anything, Arthur forces himself to think fast. It is not a lion, he imagines. It is a balloon. The balloon lands gently on his shoulder—

And turns into an octopus!

Arthur feels the coils of the tentacles around his neck. He imagines they are not there.

"I wish those rats would strangle in their own beards!" he mutters.

And they do! The three spies reel back clawing at their necks as the barber-bushes rear up and choke them. The leader, Peter, just manages to gurgle, "Think yourselves free!"

In a second the three are facing Arthur once more. And he knows now that the game is up. There is only one way out of this. They understand, and they have three brains to work with against his one. If they all attack him—

Arthur shudders as a dozen arrows suddenly sink into his back, a bolt of lightning strikes his chest, and a big rock bounces on his skull.

He thinks just in time. "I can't be hurt."

As he tears the arrows out of his unwounded body, the three blink in astonishment. For a second he has them off guard with surprise.

He turns them into butterflies.

They turn themselves into machine guns.

Arthur Arthur makes himself transparent so the bullets go through him.

They turn him to steam. He evap-

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orates, thinking wildly.

"This can't go on," he realizes. "They are too many for me. Wait—I've got it!"

A second later there are a hundred Arthur Arthurs flapping wings in the air. The trio is surrounded.

But not for long. Another second and a thousand bearded spies appear.

Arthur Arthur turns into a thousand men, each fifty feet tall. But it is too much. He cannot hold such a thought and still act. Neither can the bearded bozos.

They return to their normal single bodies again. The spies stare at Arthur Arthur in a daze.

Quick as a flash, he wills that the briefcase come to his hands.

Then the leader of the anti-razor gang goes back to normal with a vengeance. He whips out the old familiar revolver of his.

Before he can shoot, Arthur Arthur wilts the barrel down to asparagus.

But he can't go on. He can't think. Desperate, he gets one last spurt of energy.

"We are all back at the bottom of the rope again!" he thinks.

There is a crash, a flash, and a smash.

IT IS A long time later that he wakes up on the tavern floor. Omar is bending over him with the bottle ready.

Arthur sits up. All around him are familiar objects. The coil of rope. Three bearded bodies. A briefcase.

Omar picks up the rope and the briefcase.

"The police will arrive soon," he says. "Our three friends are unconscious and they can pick them up. Let us get out of here now, though. I must not delay my visit with Einstein."

Omar leads Arthur out. Arthur shakes his head. "Tell me it doesn't happen," he begs. "Those three lugs get tangled up in the rafters, don't they? I go up after them and we all fall down. I just imagine the rest."

Omar stares at him and shakes his head. He shrugs and smiles.

"Well, if it makes you feel any better," he says.

"Nothing makes me feel any better," Arthur answers. "Except maybe a drink."

"Get it yourself then," Omar tells him. "I must be on my way."

So Omar heads off in one direction and Arthur tails into the tavern where I meet him that afternoon.

I am still there, absorbing my fruit, and when he sees me he makes me sit down in a booth and tells me this story I tell you. Strange, is it not?

* * *

Lefty Feep sat back, shaking his head.

"Very strange," I admitted. "But I still don't understand why you won't eat chicken wings, or why Arthur Arthur is afraid of ropes, and all that. After all, he merely suffered from a little hypnotic experiment."

"Maybe," said Lefty Feep.

"No maybe about it," I answered. "It was pure hallucination. You and I know that the so-called Hindu rope trick is a fake. And certainly you don't believe any of that stuff about a world of Imagination lying at the other end of it, where whatever you think comes true."

"Of course I do," Feep told me.

"But even Arthur Arthur didn't believe it," I persisted.

Feep grinned.

"That is right. When he tells me the story he says he doesn't believe it really happens. Only when I take him to the doctor does he realize it

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is all a fact."

"You took Arthur to the doctor? Why?"

Feep grinned again.

"Because he makes one mistake when he wishes himself back down the rope in such a hurry. I must take him to the doctor right away, because he doesn't come down the same as when he went up."

"Meaning?"

"He has to go to the doctor and get those wings amputated!"

THE END

SUB-KILLER

★ By A. T. KEDZIE ★

"LIEUTENANT Flexner," the communicator blared, "report to operations. Lieutenant Flexner, report—"

Jake flipped the book away, and rose to his feet. He stretched and yawned. He tugged his jacket down and straightened his collar.

Kleary looked up from the card table. He grinned. "What's the matter, Jake? Are they sending you on a combat mission?"

"'Lieutenant Flexner,'" Jake mimicked, "'We have an important patrol'—ah, bull!" he finished disgustedly. "This stinking outpost will kill more men of boredom than anything else. I don't believe Nestor's seen a Sov-rocket for all his talk." Angrily Jake stalked toward operations.

Here in this isolated Greenland base, Jake thought, nothing ever has happened or ever will happen. Patrol, patrol—until you were nuts from coaxing a rocket over flat icy seas with nothing, friendly or inimical to see. Well that was war. The monotonous waiting, waiting. Jake wished he'd been put in the Bering action where the pulse of Sov-rockets was fast and furious. He shrugged resignedly and opened the door to operations...

Fifteen minutes later, Jake was flat on his belly against the riding board of a slim torpedo of steel and the rocket motors were throbbing behind him. Before him lay the flat, bitter-cold surface of the North Atlantic, a barren space now that the war drove all but heavily escorted freighters and an occasional runner from it.

As he scanned the sea and kept one eye on the radar screen, Jake thought of Nestor's words.. "Somewhere there's a crippled Sov-sub. You've got to nail it. I'm sending time-patrols out until we do get this baby. And remember, she's dangerous. They've probably got a rocket aboard her too, so kill it fast and then watch out!"

It was twenty minutes later that Jake's radar pipped—and then he knew he had her. Following the 'scope coordinates, he skimmed the surface of the icy sea at five hundred feet, the pip getting stronger all the time.

There she lay!

A class D-P 7 Sov-sub lay wallowing in the troughs of the waves! Jake could picture her frantic crew working madly to repair whatever was the trouble. Even as he nosed toward the helpless vessel, he saw the winking flame of rockets. The anti-aircraft were probably automatically triggered, he knew, but his own "pulser" would kill any proximity-fused missiles sent at him.

Already the sub was starting to submerge. Jake laughed: "No you don't," he said softly. He touched the firing trips and four missiles sped toward the sub. There was a brilliant orange-red wink of flame and the submarine vanished in the eruption of a hyper-bomb.

"Down one," Jake called softly into his throat-mike, "nailed her cold at coordinates—" He rattled off the location. Even as the word came out of his mouth, he was aware of trouble. Thundering flat across the ocean was the defense rocket the sub had managed to launch before the death blow.

Jake jerked savagely at the stick and his needle-nosed craft responded nobly. He shot skyward. And he saw two orange flares as the enemy's rockets hit the sea.

But the fast defense rocket was on his tail, its pilot cool and collected, knowing he was doomed but determined to kill the sub-killer.

The Sov-pilot was good. Fortunately his rocket wasn't good enough. Jake opened wide his throttles and in two passes he was coming in toward the Sov. Too late the enemy saw his danger. He nosed seaward, his rockets flaring white. Jake goosed his jets and the rockets thundered. Simultaneously his automatic optical fire-control touched off. The stream eighty-millimeter rockets caught the Sov-jet squarely in the middle. It disintegrated into shattered steel and aluminum.

Jake wiped the sweat from his face and turned his ship towards base. He was trembling from the excitement of the chase and the kill and the counter-chase. "Whew," he whistled half-aloud, "If that's action, brother!" The rocket droned basewards...

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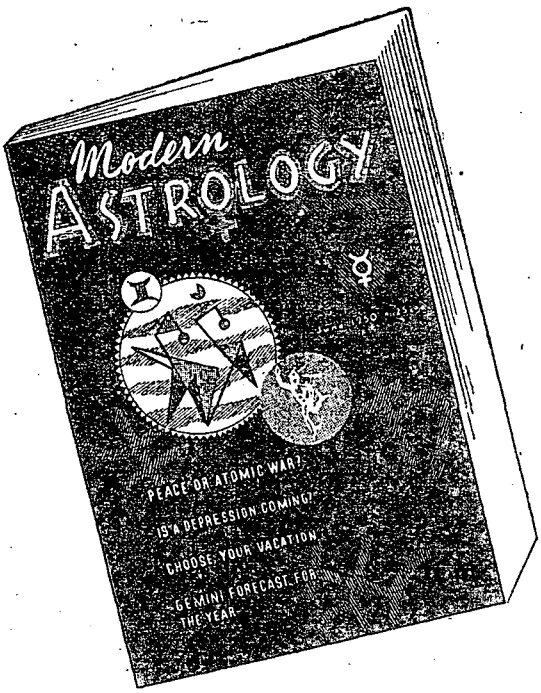

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I started to read and at once it drew my interest. Here was a writer who could really write!

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By Albert Bernsen

He tried to interest publishers in the manuscript, for he knew the world was in need of its message—and the author . . .

FIRST OF all, let me tell you about myself. I'm a writer's agent. Authors and would-be authors send their manuscripts to me. My business is to sell these manuscripts to publishers.

This particular manuscript I'm writing about came into my office with the morning mail. It was the manuscript of a book and I put it aside to give attention to the dozen or so short stories that had also arrived in the mail. At ten o'clock I went for my usual cup of coffee. Returning, I found that several pages of the bulky manuscript had been blown over the floor by a gust of wind coming in through an open window. I retrieved these carefully, but I couldn't find the title page.

I started to read and at once it drew my interest. Here was a writer who could really write! The author applied crystal clear thinking to world conditions. He drew conclusions and suggested steps that would certainly lead to enduring peace. I found myself reading not as an agent but as an ordinary reader. Three hours later I put it down. Certain that I had a best seller, I hurried with it to the biggest publisher in town, Hathcock and Wheeler. "I want to see Mr. Hathcock," I told the pretty blonde at the reception desk.

A moment later I entered the plush inner sanctum. Tom Hathcock looked up from some papers on his desk. He said, "Hello, Bill. What's the excitement?"

I guess it showed on my face. "Got a book manuscript here," I replied, dropping my squat body into the chair at his desk. His eyebrows raised.

"Now what's so unusual about that? The way you bust in—"

"The manuscript is unusual!" I exclaimed. "By that I mean it's good—really good!"

I handed it to him and without further words he began to read. I watched his facial expressions eagerly, expecting him to evince signs of interest. Perhaps fifteen minutes later he shoved the manuscript back across the table. He shrugged. "Yeah, it's good. So what? We get stuff like this every day. Self-styled experts offering a cure-all for the world's ills. Soap box oratory. Sorry, Bill, we can't take it."

I stared at him a moment. You don't get angry with publishers—to their faces that is—but this time my patience snapped. "You stupid oaf," I said. "Just because it omits sex you think it won't sell. Here's a book with *answers* to vital questions!"

He stifled a yawn. "Sorry, not interested."

The next nearest publisher was Hawthorne House, and I went there. As a rule, I don't peddle these things in person. Usually I mail them to the editors, but certainly this book deserved personal attention.

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THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF at Hawthorne House returned the manuscript to me with a sigh. "We'd be glad to take it, Bill, but we're all stocked up. And you know the paper shortage has made things tough for us...."

I didn't argue with him. Somewhere I'd find an editor with an open mind who would see the greatness in these pages.

John Tengler at Harvest Publishing Company turned the book away, saying, "Holy smoke, Bill, you ought to know the public won't go for this!"

I exploded, "Listen, whether you realize it or not, this book will sell like the bible. Every one will want to read it!"

"Nuts!" Tengler responded.

I hurried to several more publishers before the offices closed. Everywhere the answers were identical. "This philosophy stuff doesn't sell." "No sex, no sales!" "No room on our schedule." "Soap box oratory!"

Dejected I returned to my office. Here in my hands was the kind of thing a literary agent waited and prayed for all his life. And I had failed to get it published. Beautifully written and concise, each thought stood clear and revealing. Here, truly, was a book that could alleviate the world's ills. A most timely, profound book. Yet, somehow, it was away from the current trend of thinking. Even I could realize that. The ideas expressed were not in harmony with the ideas of our greatest statesmen. The author was too daring, too bold perhaps, and for that reason no publisher would print it. Again it occurred to me that I did not know the identity of the writer.

I slumped into the swivel chair behind my desk. A sheet of paper in the waste basket caught my eye. I reached in and picked it up. It was the missing page of the manuscript, bearing the title and name of the Author:

Promise For Peace
by
God

SUPERMEN

★ By CAL WEBB ★

THAT IT is necessary to study the terrific problems behind the fighting of a potential Arctic war is a necessity. Men and machines undergo their severest test under the Arctic cold. The freezing bite of low temperatures prevents both men and mechanisms from operating anywhere near efficiency.

The stories of how science is making it possible is interesting; the weather-proofing of machines, the living conditions for soldiers—these things are fascinating. But a grim note also creeps in along with the enthusiastic reports.

It seems that men can also be weather-proofed. The sinister note is that the weather-proofing consists of carefully regulated thyroid gland dosages! The activity of this gland which is so important to general health is an index of a man's activity capabilities. Shoot him full of thyroid extract and for a time, the rigors of the Arctic become as nothing to him. While this drugging method has so far been confined to animals on a large scale, it is likely that human treatments will follow.

Think of the implications. Is it possible that this is but the first step in the conditioning of men for a given function? Is it possible that in some future state men might assume definite single functions—worker, soldier, breeder—just like the termites? The thought is appalling, but in this day and age of specialization nothing seems too strange to be worth consideration.

The biochemists and the biophysicists are probing deeper and deeper into the esoteric nature of life itself. What marvels—and horrors—will they uncover?

★ ★ ★

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LORELEI OF SPACE

★ By DAN CORLISS ★

THE GREENISH light on the auto-monitor for the radar-scan started to blink rapidly. Like all good spacemen, Bill Powers reacted to that plea for help instinctively. The instrument showed the coordinates and the meters indicated distance. The call was almost directly in his line of flight.

He stabbed the forward jets and at the same time locked himself deep in the rubbery air-cushioned seat. The rapidly building deceleration—up to five G's in seven minutes—pressed his reversed seat forcing him deep into its cushiony mass. Breathing heavily Bill studied his instruments. Somebody had sent out the universal pulse for "help!" and he had to reply.

The thrum of the braking rockets pounded in his ears as his velocity was cut down rapidly. But the powerful little type L-24 was built to take stresses in her frame. She shuddered a little but that was all. Cutting deceleration, Bill scanned his screens looking for the ship which had sent out the emergency.

His eyes riveted on a pin-point of light, like a stellar image itself, but twinkling and varying—a visual call. That must be it!

It took Bill fifteen minutes to bring his vessel into contact with the helpless one. Bill didn't recognize its features or its class. It was built peculiarly but then there were plenty of odd-shaped ships scuttling their way through space.

He warped his vessel alongside. Gingerly maneuvering with single pulse-jets Bill was soon ready to board the obviously crippled craft. Her whole rear rocket-section was stove in, much as if a meteor had clipped her before the deflectors could swing her or deflect the object.

The outer lock door was broken. Bill entered the injured ship through an inner door which leaked like a sieve—the air pumps and the converters still laboring to keep the pressure up.

He didn't expect to see a girl under any conditions—much less these—but there she was, sprawled out in a closely fitting suit, apparently unconscious or dead.

Moving rapidly, Bill dragged her light bulk into his ship, with no gravity to hinder his efforts. The girl, she couldn't have been more than twenty-two, began to recover as the warmth and pressure of Bill's control cabin revived her. She sat up slowly and looked around her. Bill saw that she was extremely attractive. Beautiful face, hair—and figure.

Mentally Bill classified her as a rich man's daughter out for a private fling in a custom-built high-powered speedster, not likely to be familiar with a hard-working miner.

She smiled:

"Thanks," she said in a rich throaty voice, "I didn't think there'd ever be any help. The generators were going fast."

"You are lucky," Bill agreed, grinning, "thank the monitor, not me. That spotted your call."

"The meteor hit me about six hours ago," the girl said. "I went out, but everything was on automatic so the signals were sent. I must have fainted a dozen times."

She told her story fast and glibly. Too fast and glibly. A little alarm bell began ringing in the back of Bill's head. This lush creature just didn't look like a girl who'd gone through a space wreck. The more Bill listened the more puzzled he became.

He was staring at her eyes now. They were a rich purple and as he looked into them for a minute he felt a pulse of heat sweep through him. The girl's face blurred. Coraine she called herself.

And then Bill knew.

This was no simple space-wrecked girl. This was was no person crying for help, stranded in a wrecked vessel. This was wrong and alien. This was fearsome and subtly evil.

The girl was looking up at him now and her red lips were parted. Her gleaming white teeth seemed to change, almost resolve themselves into pointed—what?

Summoning up some strength, some awareness deep within himself, Bill forced himself to look away. The minute his eyes left her face he hurled himself at her. But it wasn't a girl he took in his arms. An alien something writhed beneath him borne backward by the force and ferocity of his abrupt attack. His fists smashed again and again against flesh which was not human. An unearthly shriek tore from the creature's lips.

Then, without pausing to continue the fight the "girl" fled toward the lock and then through. She wore no space suit and Bill saw her head for the wreck from which she'd just been taken, moving like a wraith, as unsubstantial as the empty space she breathed.

They called it "hallucinations" back at the base, but the oldtimers knew better. "Lorelei," they'd whisper, "Bill Powers saw one o'them Lorelei. She almost got him, too..."

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The RELUCTANT GENII

A genii is bound by certain laws to obey its master. But this particular genii was reluctant to cooperate—and justly so . . .

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Reggie stared in blank amazement. He had expected a strange thing to happen but certainly not this! Who had ever heard of a genii in evening dress? . . .

By P. F. Costello

REGINALD VAN SCHUYLER was a lean but lissom young man with blond hair and a perpetually startled expression on his narrow and not unlikable face. He was the final genealogical product of two famous and intricately interwoven strains, the van Schuylers and the du Berrys, and as such provided a rather shocking example of the ill effects of centuries of inbreeding.

Reggie was no moron, of course. His best friends wouldn't go that far in his defense. On the other hand he was no cretin in spite of what his enemies and creditors had to say on the subject.

Reggie was in essence a simple-minded, scatter-brained, moderately harmless fellow, who believed anything he read or was told, and who had never to anyone's sure knowledge performed a single productive act in his life.

Considering all this it was no wonder that Deborah Ardliegh behaved in

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a peculiar manner when she opened the door of her home and found him standing on the porch.

She put a finger to her lips imperatively and grabbed him by the arm.

"Come inside but be quiet," she whispered. "Father's in the study."

"What ho!" Reggie said, as he was dragged through the door and into a spacious foyer.

"Do be still," Deborah said. "You know how father feels about you."

"Rather cool, eh? Cool is the word, eh?" Reggie shrugged. He couldn't understand the old boy. Loud, trumpeting ass, always yelling about people getting jobs, working, toeing the mark, hitting the ball.

"We'll go onto the sun porch," Deborah said. "He won't find us there."

The sun porch faced the Western side of the Ardleigh estate and the view of gardens, trees and tennis courts that could be enjoyed from there was extremely pleasant. Now the sun was setting and the flowers and shrubs were glowing in its last pale light.

Reggie sat down and reclined in a lounge that was conveniently near a wicker table on which there were bottles, ice, a siphon and glasses. He made himself a drink and let the beauty of the approaching night enter his soul.

Deborah sat on a straight chair and smiled at him with maternal fondness.

"Okay, tell me all about it," she said.

She was very attractive as she waited expectantly for him to answer. The sun picked up lights in her shining brown hair, and the casual suit she wore emphasized the slim exciting lines of her body.

"Well?"

Reggie was frowning. "All about what?"

"Your new job, silly. The one you started today."

"Oh that." Reggie beamed as his memory shot back to a time that seemed incredibly long ago. It *was* incredibly long ago, he reflected, pleased with his retentiveness. It was all the way back to this morning, a full ten hours.

"Do go on, Reggie. This job means a lot to us, you know."

"Oh, you're still talking about the job." Reggie frowned. It seemed to him they had hashed the subject and dismissed it just a second ago. Well, women were odd. They liked to worry a thing around.

"The job got away from me," he said. "It was queer. One minute there I was, working away like a badger, and the next thing I knew I was back at the club having a drink."

"Oh, Reggie," Deborah said. "What happened this time?"

REGGIE sipped his drink reflectively, getting all the loose ends straight. "It had to do with tidying up, I think," he said. "There were all these checks, you see, and they kept piling up on my desk in an awful mess, so I sensibly bundled them up and disposed of them in the lavatory."

"I suppose," Deborah said in a dull voice, "the Bank had already given depositors credit for those checks. Oh, you wouldn't even know what that meant," she said suddenly and angrily. "Reggie when are you going to wake up and start making a living?"

Reggie stared at her in astonishment. One instant they'd been talking in the friendliest possible fashion about his work, and now she was all excited about some other matter. It kept a man hopping to keep up with a woman.

Deborah came and sat beside him

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and took his hand. "I didn't mean to be upset," she said. "You're sweet and innocent Reggie and I love you. But don't you see, you went ahead today in your usual witless, unthinking fashion and did something that will probably cost the bank a lot of money."

"Hmmm," Reggie said. "Hadn't looked at it that way."

"Father got you that job and now he'll be that much more unsold on you when he hears what has happened."

"I won't tell him," Reggie said promptly.

"Oh, he probably knows already. Not that that matters *too* much, Reggie. But I want you to prove yourself to him, just for my sake. I want to marry you at a time when we can both tell him to go to hell if we feel like it."

"Ha!" Reggie said. "I always feel like it."

Deborah walked to the windows and gazed out across the darkening lawns of the estate and sighed deeply. Finally she turned and smiled at Reggie. "I'm suddenly getting a headache," she said. "Would you mind postponing our date until tomorrow?"

"Not at all," Reggie said. "Headache, eh? Too much thinking," he said, nodding. "Trouble today. Everyone going about thinking all the time."

They walked through the drawing room, the library, and came to the foyer.

"Sorry I'm such a dud tonight," Deborah said.

"Pish and tosh," Reggie said. He put his hand against a vase that decorated the newel post of the bannister. He leaned his weight against it confidently and Deborah let out a sudden, warning scream.

She was too late.

The vase toppled and crashed to the floor and Reggie lost his balance. The vase broke into dozens of jagged pieces and Reggie landed on the seat of his pants amid its splintered fragments.

"Oh, Reggie!" Deborah moaned.

A door on the opposite side of the foyer opened and a loud, irritated voice cried: "What in the name of Heaven and Hell is going on around here?"

The voice came into the foyer like a herd of bull elephants and it was followed by a huge, shaggy-haired man with a choleric face and wild eyes.

"Now daddy," Deborah said, "it was an accident. He—"

"*You*!" Adolph Ardleigh shouted, pointing a finger the size of a banana at Reggie.

"What ho!" Reggie said cheerily.

Adolph Ardliegh stared up at the ceiling and his lips moved soundlessly. His great hands clenched and unclenched spasmodically.

REGGIE got nimbly to his feet and dusted off the seat of his pants. He had found through long experience that it was best to ignore the old codger. Reggie secretly harbored the conviction that old Ardleigh was a bit potty. All this muttering to himself, and counting up to ten. Hardly the behavior of a man you'd care to know socially.

Deborah's father lowered his gaze to Reggie and while his hands had stopped their nervous clenching the color of his face was like that of a blood-shot tomato.

"I was hoping to see you," he said, controlling his voice with a strenuous effort. "Myers at the First National called me after dinner."

Reggie brightened. "Myers, eh? The noisy chap with the gray hair and monocle?"

"*He* is the president of the bank," Mr. Ardleigh shouted. "He called to

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tell me that never in his experience had he met anyone so incompetent, demoralizing and supercilious as you."

"I say! It was nice of him to call, wasn't it?"

"Reggie, it's no compliment," Deborah said wearily.

Mr. Ardleigh rubbed his forehead and stared in glassy-eyed fascination at Reggie. "Go away," he said hoarsely. "Don't say anything else. I'm at the breaking point. My doctor told me I can't afford to even think about you."

"You're not very well, are you?" Reggie said with a note of hope in his voice. He grinned broadly and winked at Deborah.

"Get out!" Mr. Ardleigh bellowed.

"What ho!" Reggie said, blinking. Suddenly the old fool was blowing his top. A true-blue loon, Reggie decided.

"Please go, Reggie," Deborah said. "I'll call you tomorrow."

"Righto! Cheers and all that," Reggie said; and slid out the door, happy to escape.

Outside in the dusky evening light Reggie was overcome with gloom. Filtering through the solid mass of his brain was the idea that he'd made a hash of things. Tonight was to have been a celebration, he realized. He and Deborah were going to tie one on in honor of his first day on the new job. And look what happened? Reggie kicked the head of a daisy in disgust. Why hadn't he been clever enough to hold back the sour news until *after* the celebration. That way he'd have at least had the pleasure of hoisting a few with Deborah, and *on* Deborah, he realized with a pang. She had intended to stand the drinks! Oh, he was a bloody fool, he thought morosely.

Standing at the entrance of the Ardleigh estate Reggie had the option of walking back to the station for a train to the city, or of standing where he was and doing nothing. He decided gloomily he might as well go on home, but his soul was in a mellow contemplative cast and he turned off the road and wandered down to the shore of the Ardleigh's private bay. Here the night air sang softly and the surface of the water was shining a welcome to the rising moon.

Reggie wandered along the beach heading in a rather indirect way toward the station. He was enjoying the somber beauty of the night free from distraction. The difficulty with Mr. Ardleigh had slipped from his mind. His soul was calm and peaceful.

A GLEAMING object at the waterline caught his eye and he strolled closer to investigate. It was, he saw, a slender vase about six inches high, tightly stoppered by a wooden plug. It was rolling back and forth on the edge of the water as light waves lapped against it.

Reggie picked it up and looked it over thoroughly. Its curving sides were adorned with graceful designs painted in red against the gray background of the vase. A pretty item, Reggie thought, pleased with himself. He had never before in his life found anything of interest or value.

A pleasant picture appeared in his mind, the picture of himself exhibiting the vase casually at bars or in the homes of friends, and saying, "Just a little thing I found on the beach one night. Pays to keep the old eye peeled, you see." He wondered if he could say then that he found lots of things in his nightly rambles. Well, why not? Make a good longish story out of it that way.

Feeling immensely buoyed by his discovery he dropped the vase into his outside pocket and headed on toward home.

Reggie lived in the heart of the city

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in a good men's club. He was arrears in his dues and house account, and had been for so long that it seemed the normal situation by now. The dunning letters he received from the club secretary were as much a part of his life as his love for Deborah.

The board of governor's at the club were slightly reluctant to kick Reggie into the street because he was a van Schuyler. And there had always been van Schuylers at the club. Reggie's great-grandfather had been a charter member; and since that time van Schuylers of various branches of the family tree had been members. They were not remembered with any fondness, but rather as disputatious bores who cluttered up the various bars and reading rooms and made civilized conversation impossible. However, in spite of the bad reputation of his ancestors, Reggie *was* the last of the line and so got away with murder.

On this night he asked the room clerk if there was any mail for him and then strolled on toward the elevators without waiting for an answer. The room clerk didn't bother looking in Reggie's mail slot, of course. It was Reggie's feeling, shared by the clerk, that no one would ever bother writing to him.

Upstairs in his two-room suite Reggie put the vase on the dresser and stared at it admiringly. It did give the place tone.

Whistling contentedly Reggie got into a robe and then took a long shower after which he opened the windows wide and prepared to settle down in bed for ten hours of solid sleep. He was plumping up the pillows with an anticipatory smile on his face when a voice, a rather small but querulous voice, said: "Let me out, dash it. I say, let me out!"

Reggie straightened slowly and peered in confusion about the room. Obviously, he was the only one present. It occurred to him that he might have been talking to himself, but that didn't hold water. He had given up that practice when he realized how boring he was to listen to. He shrugged and went back to making his bed more inviting and comfortable.

"*Well, did you hear me?*"

This time Reggie realized that the mysterious voice had taken on a sharper edge. He became annoyed. The chap, *whoever* he was, had a boorish approach.

"Of course I heard you," Reggie said. "There's no point in being sullen about it, old chap."

"Then let me out!"

THE VOICE emanated an overtone of controlled anger and Reggie became slightly apprehensive. He was easily bulldozed by a show of anger, since he subconsciously realized that any anger directed at him was probably justified.

"All right, all right," he said, placatingly. "But where in the deuce are you?"

"I'm in the vase, you ass! Where did you think I was?"

"Well, I'm no mind reader," Reggie said huffily. "You might have been anywhere."

He went to the dresser, picked up the vase and inspected it thoughtfully.

"You're inside, eh?" he said, making a shrewd guess.

"Well, I'm not *outside*!" the voice said sarcastically. "Remove the stopper and you'll see."

"Righto," Reggie said.

He tugged at the stopper with his fingers but the wood had expanded in the water and he couldn't get it out. Next he tried thumping the bottom of the vase in the hope of popping the stopper out as he had seen clever fellows do with corks in wine bottles.

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But that was equally unsuccessful. Finally he had an inspiration. Digging into his drawer he found a corkscrew and with that he attacked the wooden stopper.

"Well! the voice said impatiently. "What seems to be the trouble?"

"I say, take it easy," Reggie said, panting with the exertion of attempting to draw out the wooden plug.

Finally it eased slightly and started to come out. Reggie pulled harder and it popped out suddenly, almost causing him to lose his balance.

He put the vase on the bureau and then stepped back in astonishment as a thick column of thick smoke streamed up toward the ceiling. The smoke came from the mouth of the vase and formed a solid mass above the dresser.

Reggie shook his head bewilderedly and retreated to the door from where he watched the smoke with a disturbed frown. This was getting a bit thick, he thought with a touch of anger. Here he was ready for bed and this had to happen!

The thick cloud of smoke formed into a ball several feet in diameter and drifted down toward the floor, silently, spectrally.

Gradually the shape of the smoke began to change. It lengthened into an oblong column about six feet tall on the top of which a circle roughly the size of a bowling ball emerged. The density of the smoke increased as its wavering motion disappeared imperceptively.

Reggie saw with a start that the smoke had formed the shape of a human being!

"Well, well," he muttered.

Suddenly, the swirling motion of the smoke stopped altogether, and the smoke itself was abruptly gone, and in its place stood a tall, aristocratic gentleman with silky white hair and skin the color of well-seasoned mahogany.

"What ho!" Reggie said weakly.

"I take it that those unrelated and imbecilic words constitute something of a greeting," the brown-skinned man observed icily.

"Hmmmm," Reggie said. He studied the man thoughtfully, noting the handsome, acquiline features, the lean, elegant body, and the conservative dark clothes. "I say," he blurted suddenly, "did you come out of that vase?"

"That is correct."

Reggie grinned suddenly. "That's a dashed good trick. I mean, at a cocktail party one could startle hell out one's friends with that sort of thing."

"It is hardly a trick," the man said, looking at Reggie carefully, and with just a touch of confusion in his intelligent gray eyes. "Permit me to introduce myself," he said. "My name is Ragore, Sir Mahanda Ragore. I am a Genii."

"Oh," Reggie said, disappointed. "That popping out of the vase is natural for you then. I mean, it's nothing you could teach *me,* for instance. It's probably just for Geniis."

The man who had introduced himself as Sir Mahanda Ragore stared at Reggie for an uncomprehending instant; and then he took a monocle from his vest pocket, screwed it into his right eye socket and studied Reggie as one might some strange but harmless insect.

Finally he said: "What precisely do you know about Geniis, young man?"

"Not too much, I'm afraid," Reggie said. "But here, have a seat. And a smoke. No point in our standing about as if we were strangers at a college reunion."

"Ah—thank you," Ragore said slowly. He sat down and took a cigarette from the box that Reggie offered him. "You don't seem—ah—surprised or

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alarmed at my arrival," he said, when Reggie had taken a seat and was puffing on a cigarette.

"Gave me a turn, all right," Reggie said, crossing his legs and settling down comfortably in his chair. "But there you were, *are,* for that matter, so the matter is pretty well settled. You're here and we'll have to make the best of it. Now—"

Reggie suddenly slapped his forehead with his palm and leaped to his feet. Ragore straightened in alarm.

"Well, well, well," Reggie said, beaming down at him with a wide grin. "I *am* slow on the uptake tonight!"

"I beg your pardon, but I don't understand."

Reggie chuckled. "Let's go to the kernel, shall we? You're a Genii, right?"

"That is correct."

"And you were stashed away in an old vase, eh? Probably by some wicked sorcerer, right?"

"No, it was a sea captain, but what is your point?"

"Ha! Righto! Get to the kernel. I rescued you, eh?" Reggie patted the Genii on the shoulder and grinned amiably. "Glad to do it, old boy. And now—" He paused and winked slyly. "And now you've got a little something for *me,* eh?"

"I haven't the slightest notion of what you're talking about," Ragore said firmly.

Reggie frowned. "You're not playing the game, old man. According to *my* information, now's the time for you to cough up a few traysfull of jewels and the like."

"A few traysfull of *jewels!*" Ragore said, with an expression of well-bred astonishment. "I don't quite see—" He stopped and a look of understanding appeared on his face. Smiling, he said: "Forgive my ignorance. I'd forgotten for the moment the extremely odd behavior of my ancestors. Yes, you're quite right, *they* frequently gave away jewels and money and gold to their rescuers. You see they were very simple, childish people, so we can't blame them for their extravagant and ridiculous behavior. They did all sorts of silly things."

"Silly!" Reggie cried. "I call it dashed decent of them to show a little gratitude."

RAGORE, the Genii, smiled. "Times and customs change. You must keep in mind that when my ancestors were making such grand gestures that there was no income tax. Nor had the British arrived in India with their generous proposal to trade us the English bible for our oils, jewels and gold. The lot of a Genii today is hardly the rosy thing it was a few short thousands of years ago, my young friend."

"You mean then I get nothing for rescuing you?"

"That is the essence of the thought I am attempting to convey," Ragore said, smiling.

Reggie sat down dejectedly. What a cropper! One instant he had seen the solution of all his troubles, and the next thing he was right back in the glue.

"It's not fair," he muttered.

"You have my sympathy," Ragore said, lighting another cigarette. "But if I spent my income foolishly in grand gestures of gratitude I'd soon be digging into my capital. And I presume you know what *that* means. Also, I'm a younger son, which is unfortunate."

Reggie looked at him in alarm. "You're not working up to ask *me* for a loan, are you?"

Ragore smiled tolerantly. "No, I'm comfortably fixed at the present. You

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see, the original family fortune was large and productive. I was well educated, at Oxford it so happened, and always enjoyed the best things of life. My last unfortunate inprisonment occured in the latter part of the nineteenth century while I was sailing from London to Calcutta. There was a party, you see, and we were in the captain's quarters drinking rather heavily." Ragore put out his cigarette and smiled embarrassedly. "I had rather of a load when someone suggested I vaporize myself and get into that vase." He pointed sheepishly at the vase on the dresser. "Well, I did it all right, because there was a pretty girl present I was trying to impress, but then some idiot put a stopper into it and the captain, an unmannerly dog, who *also* liked the pretty girl, threw it into the channel. I've been sort of a drifter ever since," he concluded, with a deprecating smile for his pun.

"Well, you did have things pretty nice," Reggie said, in an injured voice. "And you're still in top-hole shape, I gather."

Ragore blew a contented stream of smoke toward the ceiling. "Yes, I have no major complaints," he said.

"Well, look," Reggie said persuasively. "How about helping me out a bit?"

Ragore pursed his lips cautiously. "As I've explained, I just *can't* go around letting my heart rule my head."

Reggie found himself developing an active dislike toward Ragore, Genii or not.

"However," Ragore continued with an expansive smile, "I will help you any way I can. I will give you the benefit of my advice, my business acumen, and I will turn a fatherly and interested eye on your affairs."

"Well, that's decent of you," Reggie said, nodding.

"But first, I need sleep," Ragore said, rising and moving briskly to Reggie's bed. He felt its resiliency with his hands and smiled cheerfully. "A capital bed," he said.

"I say," Reggie said.

"If you'll turn the lights off in here I daresay I can make out very well," Ragore said. "Now until tomorrow morning my young friend, I bid you *au revoir*."

Feeling all in all as if he'd made a bad mistake in bothering to open the vase, Reggie trudged into his small sitting room where he spent a miserable night on the sofa...

THE NEXT morning Reggie hurried into the bedroom and frowned bewilderedly when he found it empty. Had he dreamt all that business about Ragore; the tight-fisted Genii? Hardly! The bed *had* been slept in.

Reggie was concerned because he had remembered that he *did* have a business proposition which Ragore might help him analyze and investigate. It was an offer from a man named Big Foot Maguire, and Reggie had been mulling it over for several days. The trouble was he had mulled it over until it slipped out of his mind altogether. Now, with Ragore's acumen and experience, the thing might be got into operation.

He was showering when he heard the door of his suite open. Finishing his toilet hurriedly, he popped into the bedroom and found Ragore sitting in the easy chair at the window looking at the morning paper with an absorbed expression.

"Ah, you've been out," Reggie said, making a quick deduction.

"Yes. Fascinating city, I must say. Progress has been amazing since my time. And by the way, I arranged for a room here and a guest card. That, I

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presume, is satisfactory?"

Reggie grinned weakly. "That's fine. You've had breakfast?"

"Yes, an excellent one. I found the dining room and the barber shop. I've also had a stroll. The place abounds with business opportunities."

"Oh, that reminds me," Reggie beamed. "I have a friend who's made me a proposition, and I thought—"

"Capital. I like business propositions. Keeps the wits sharp. I'll be delighted to give you my advice."

"Great!" Reggie felt a new surge of confidence and optimism. "Let's be off."

Big Foot Maguire lived in the penthouse of a fabled hotel with a blonde chorus girl named Mimi. Reggie wasn't exactly sure what Big Foot did for a living. It had something to do with horse racing and slot machines though. That much he knew for sure.

He and Ragore took an elevator to the penthouse where a bored young man with very cold blue eyes met them at the doorway.

"Yeah?" he said.

"I wish to see Mr. Big Foot Maguire," Reggie said. "He knows me. I'm Reginald van Schuyler."

The bored young man put a toothpick in his mouth and studied Reggie carefully. Finally he shrugged and closed the door.

Ragore, the Genii, glanced at Reggie with raised eyebrows. "Rather cool reception, don't you think? Just what sort of a business proposition are we investigating?"

"It's awfully complicated," Reggie said, frowning. He was trying to find words to explain it, when the door opened and the bored young man said, "Come on in fellas. Big Foot'll be along in a few minutes."

They entered the foyer which led to an immense sunken living room. The draperies and rugs were light gray and the blonde-wood furniture was modernistic in design. A picture window at the far end of the room gave them a fabulous view of the city.

Ragore smiled happily. "I like this very much," he murmured. "It's so —rich."

BIG FOOT MAGUIRE came in a few minutes later. He was a stocky, vigorous looking man in his early forties, with a ruddy, healthy complexion, and a volatile energy that was as overwhelming as a tidal wave.

"Reggie, you old son of a gun," he shouted, slapping him on the back with a thick hand. "Glad to see you finally got some sense." He turned to Ragore and punched him suddenly in the ribs with an extended thumb. "Ha!" he yelled, as Ragore jumped nervously. "Friend's of Reggie's are friends of mine."

"This is Mahanda Ragore," Reggie said.

Big Foot let out a delighted scream. "Mahanda Ragore! Silliest damn name I ever heard of."

"I beg your pardon, sir, but—"

Big Foot broke into Ragore's pained protest by abruptly jabbing him again with his thumb. He slapped his thigh and gasped for breath as Ragore leaped into the air like a jack rabbit.

"Don't do that, sir!" Ragore cried.

Mimi, Big Foot's girl friend, walked into the room and said petulantly, "Why don't you stop screaming, Big Foot? Can't get a minute's rest around here without you jabbing people in the ribs and bellowing like a moose."

"Ha!" Big Foot yelled good naturedly. "Quite a sense of humor she's got, eh?"

That was not all Mimi had, Reggie reflected pleasantly. She was a statuesque, gorgeously molded creature,

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with long exciting legs, and hair the color of a brandy milk punch.

Ragore cleared his throat noisily and Reggie saw that he was staring at Mimi like a starving man at a Smorgasbord.

She nodded perfunctorily at Reggie whom she'd met before, but stopped when she noticed Ragore. "Well, I'll be darned," she said, grinning. "He looks like a Man of Distinction sort of, don't he?"

She patted him on the cheek and then strolled on to a divan where she nestled down with an amiable purr. Ragore's eyes swiveled around in their sockets as she crossed her slim bare legs.

Big Foot looked at him and then jabbed him in the ribs with his thumb. "Wake up, wake up," he cried, purple with mirth. "Get your eyes off the merchandise. That's a sample and it ain't for sale."

"I assure you," Ragore sputtered, "that—"

"I know, I know," Big Foot said, chortling. "When guys stop collapsing when they see her I'll throw her out. Until then she'll get you nothing but a cement overcoat. Now, let's get down to some shop talk. You thought about my idea, eh Reggie?"

"Well, er, yes. So I told Ragore—"

"Now where does he come in?"

"I am his financial adviser," Ragore said, stiffly.

"Okay, okay. Now here's the pitch. I got books, handbooks, you know, all over the east. We got service for anybody who wants to put down a bet—but there's a hitch. We got no representatives in them snooty clubs. There's lots of money around there and those blue-blooded schmoes got just as much right as the next guy to put down a bet when they want to. Am I signifying, chums?"

"I'm not sure I follow you," Ragore said, and Reggie saw his eye slide involuntarily toward Mimi. It slid only so far and then whipped back to Big Foot. "I mean, what kind of bets do you handle?"

"Horse bets, horse bets," Big Foot said, irritably. "Where you been all your life? Get awake! We ain't running no church social. We got protection, right up to the super of police. And I want Reggie to be my boy. I want him to line up these chumps in his club and give 'em good honest service."

"That's the kernel of the matter," Reggie said excitedly to Ragore. "There's a frightful amount of money to be made."

"Money, money, that's it," Big Foot yelled cheerfully, and jabbed Ragore in the ribs.

"We'll have to think about it," Ragore said, backing away nervously.

"Sure think it over, take all the time you want, but lemme know by tonight, right?"

"Er—right," Ragore said.

His left eye slid over to Mimi again and Big Foot let out a squeal of laughter and jabbed him again in the ribs. "Ripe, eh?" he bellowed.

Downstairs they stopped for a cup of coffee. Ragore wiped his forehead and gazed at Reggie despairingly. "That man is a gangster," he said. "You can't get mixed up with him. You'll end your days in jail."

"I was afraid there'd be a hitch," Reggie said, moodily. "You see no hope for the deal, eh?"

"None whatsoever," Ragore said. "The man is a beast, and that girl—"

"A bit of all right, eh?" Reggie grinned.

Ragore cleared his throat. "Gentlemen don't discuss such things, old boy. However, I think I might go so far as to say she has an unusually large amount of—er—animal appeal."

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THAT NIGHT Reggie took the Genii out to the Ardleighs'. There was no other course. He had a date with Deborah and Ragore insisted on coming along.

However, to his total surprise, Ragore and old man Ardleigh struck it off famously. They talked of business, and of finance, and licked their lips as the powerful, mighty words of the trade marts rolled from their mouths.

In the library after dinner the three men sat over brandy while Deborah was freshening her makeup.

"You know, an idea occured to me today," Ragore said, ruminatively. He sipped brandy and took a long pull on his cigar. "The parking problem in the center of your city is acute. However, I wondered if anyone has thought of utilizing the space atop office buildings."

Mr. Ardleigh frowned and rubbed his chin. "You may have something there."

"A hydraulic lift could be built at the rear of the buildings, perhaps," Ragore said.

Ardleigh hunched forward, elbows on his knees, and looked into the fire with a thoughtful frown. "Perhaps. Rampways zigzagging all the way up would be more expensive, but it would allow faster handling."

Reggie had listened proudly to Ragore's proposal. This might show Ardleigh that he had some clever friends.

"I say, I think the idea is capital," he cried.

Ragore and Mr. Ardleigh exchanged a significant look before turning to Reggie. "I'm glad you approve," Ardleigh said, and turned back to Ragore.

"Two men with sufficient means might investigate this problem," Ragore said.

"My thought, exactly. Reggie."

"Yes."

"Supposing you wait in the foyer for Deborah. Mr. Ragore and I are going to talk this matter over and you might find it boring."

"Oh, I won't be bored," Reggie said, cheerfully. "It sounds like pots of money are going to be made and I'd like to hear about it."

"Reggie, we wish to discuss this in private, if you please," Ragore said."

Reggie sighed and went and stood in the foyer. When Deborah came down the steps he grinned and blew her a kiss.

"My, you look pretty," he said.

"Thanks. Where's father and Mr. Ragore?"

"Oh. Oh they're talking business. Very dull sort of stuff," Reggie said. He had decided to put on a brave front. "I left them to it."

When he brought Deborah back later that night he found the two men standing at a large table on which were scattered sheets of paper covered with figures and diagrams of a weird nature. He discovered then that Ragore had made plans to move into the Ardleigh home to facilitate closer contact with Mr. Ardleigh on his business venture.

Reggie realized sadly that he had lost his Genii. Not that Ragore had been any good to him, but Reggie *had* found him and he felt a sense of loss now that old man Ardleigh was taking over.

He said goodnight listlessly to Deborah and wended his way homeward.

As he was crossing the street to his club a strange thing happened—a thing that made him pause and reflect.

A car driven at high speed roared out from nowhere and nearly ran him down. Only Reggie's startled agility saved him and even then he would have knocked into eternity if the driv-

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er hadn't swerved at the last second to avoid striking a fire plug.

The car went down the empty street and Reggie staggered on toward the club, his heart thumping madly.

It wasn't the narrowness of the escape that unnerved him.

It was the fact that the driver of the car was a young man with a bored face—the same young man he had seen earlier in the day in Big Foot Maguire's apartment.

What did that mean?

It was this question that Reggie carried uneasily to his bed.

THE NEXT morning he dressed hurriedly and went downstairs still unnerved by what had happened the night before. He had the gloomy conviction that everything in his life was going to the dogs.

Preparing to leave the club for a reviving stroll he saw something that made him start like a neurotic rabbit. Standing across the street with a cigarette in his thin lips was the bored young man from Big Foot's apartment.

Reggie pursed his lips thoughtfully and tried to control the nervous trembling of his fingers. Somehow, deep in his subconscious, Reggie knew that if this bored young man had attempted to kill him the night before that his present attitude was not one of chummy good cheer.

For a moment or two Reggie watched the bored looking man across the street. The man was sucking on a toothpick and seemed totally uninterested in anything in the world. But his eyes never left the club entrance.

Reggie turned and went hastily to his room. The phone was ringing as he entered. He scooped it up and said hello.

"Reggie, this is Mimi! Kid, I didn't think you had it in you."

Mimi! Big Foot's girl! Reggie loosened his collar nervously. "*What* didn't you think I had in me?" he asked suspiciously.

"Why the guts to turn the heat on rat! Kid you gave Big Foot a hot foot with a blow torch! And I love you for it."

"I say," Reggie said feebly. "I—I don't know what you mean."

Mimi laughed gaily. "You know, all right. You'll probably get ventilated in about sixty-eight places for what you did, but I say it's worth it! I've taken that big ox's guff for so long that it's a pleasure to see him on the receiving end."

"Now just a minute," Reggie cried. "I—"

"Look, kid, I can't talk anymore. I'll probably never see you again—nobody will after a while, I suppose—but you're a dead game character and we could have made sweet music together, if you dig me."

Reggie peered at the receiver as if he expected to find there some explanation for all this nonsense. "Now listen to me," he said, taking a firm stand. "What's all this business about nobody seeing me anymore?"

"Oh, you sweet cluck," Mimi said softly. "You're trying to play dumb. Big Foot'll get you if he has to spend a lifetime at it. G'bye, baby, I can't talk anymore."

The connection was broken with a dry and final click. Reggie shrugged in bewilderment. Who could make any sense from that hysterical creature?

The door opened while he was pondering the matter and Ragore strolled in. The Genii was wearing a new suit, a dark worsted with a narrow pin stripe, and carrying a walking stick. He was impeccably groomed, freshly shaved, and looked as if he might begin purring any minute from sheer blank contentment.

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"Well," Reggie said.

Ragore raised an eyebrow and surveyed him calmly. "You sound out of sorts, old chap. I just dropped in to say goodby. Mr. Ardleigh and I are in business now, you know, so I won't be seeing you any more, I fear. We signed the papers this morning and arranged for the necessary financial backing to inaugurate our enterprise, and so—" Ragore smiled contentedly, not bothering to finish the sentence.

"You're all set, eh?" Reggie said moodily. "Money, friends, all the best, eh? No need for me anymore."

"Actually, I never needed you, old man," Ragore said.

"Well, who let you out of the vase?"

RAGORE shrugged. "A temporary inconvenience. Not that I'm not grateful, understand, but I *have* been rescued on other occasions by more intelligent and socially acceptable people."

"Wait a minute," Reggie said, suddenly, as the Genii turned to the door. "I just had a call from Mimi, Big Foot Maguire's girl?"

"Yes?" Ragore turned back eagerly and while he didn't actually drool, he created the impression that he would at the slightest provocation.

"She jabbered away about some trouble I'm supposed to be in with Big Foot. And last night one of Big Foot's men—the bored chap—tried to run me down in his automobile." Reggie regarded the Genii with a new and awful suspicion. "Do *you* know anything about that?"

"Why, of course," Ragore said, pulling on his gloves. "I called the police as a matter of public duty after our interview with him yesterday. I explained to them the nature of his proposal to you, and mentioned his other operations in this area. They were quite grateful, I must say."

"Oh!" Reggie smiled in understanding. "Well that explains that." And then another thought struck him squarely. "But, I say. If *you* called the police, then why is Big Foot after *me?*"

"Well, naturally, I didn't give them my name," Ragore said. "I called and used *your* name, of course. I had no intention of getting mixed up with that gang of thugs. *Au revoir!*"

Reggie sank into a chair and stared at the door that closed on Ragore's erect and smartly tailored back. Now it was all hideously clear. Ragore, that prince of rats, had informed on Big Foot, using his, Reggie's name. And Big Foot would not rest until he had run Reggie through a wringer and thrown what was left of him into the river.

Reggie stared disconsolately at his shoes. Everywhere he turned the future was black. Rising he tottered out of the room and down to the bar.

Three drinks failed to rally his shriveled spirits. He leaned limply against the bar, staring somberly at his long bony face, and wondered how much time he had left. That made him very sad and since he couldn't break hours down into minutes anyway, he gave it up and went on with his drinking. By that afternoon Reggie had reached a state of heroic inebriation. He had forgotten in the mists of alcohol the exact nature of his problems. But while the details escaped him he still was aware that he was in a nasty pickle, and that it was all Ragore's fault.

And so, sometime around dinner, as he was tossing off his fifteenth sidecar, it occured to him that as a gentleman he was bound to settle things with the Genii. For several moments he turned that thought over and around. It was a pleasant one. And

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from some unknown depth in his subconscious the sidecars chased forth a streak of bold cunning and a series of wonderful ideas.

Giggling with pleasure he weaved his way to the telephones and put through a call to Big Foot Maguire's apartment. The phone was answered by Mimi, the person he wanted to talk with, and congratulated himself on the success of his first move.

"Old girl," he mumbled.

"Who's this?"

"Ish Reggie. Old Reggie."

"Oh." Mimi's voice softened. "What is it, kid?"

"Remember all that about sweet noise, making sweet noise together?"

"Well, yes—"

"Gotta see you, gotta see you right away," Reggie said, hiccupping gently.

"Gosh, it's an awful chance, Reggie." She was silent a moment, then spoke hurriedly. "Okay, kid. I'll meet you at the Drake. I have a room there, 609. Got that?"

"Check and check," Reggie said happily.

Next he called the Ardleigh home and asked for Ragore.

"Well, old Genii," he said, when Ragore answered. "How're things?"

"What is it you wish?" Ragore said coldly.

"Look, chum," Reggie said, tittering. "You know Mimi? Well, she goes for you. And I'm fixing things up for you tonight. Oke?"

Ragore cleared his throat. "Well, this is most sudden. Mimi, eh? Well—"

TWO HOURS later Reggie and Ragore presented themselves at the door of apartment 609 at the Drake. Mimi answered their knock and seemed surprised to see Ragore.

"Had to bring him along," Reggie muttered, winking broadly at her. "Had to slip out the back of the club, too."

"What is he, your bodyguard?"

Reggie laughed happily in lieu of an answer and then called room service. He ordered liquor, of all types, vintages, and potencies.

Mimi was dressed for an *intime* occasion and she seemed slightly nettled at Ragore's presence. She pulled the folds of her silk-mesh robe about her and sat down on a chaise lounge. There was very little under the robe, Reggie noted with approval. His interest was not personal. He was merely surveying the area with the detachment of a good general.

Ragore's brown skin was tinted with an undertone of pink and he was breathing like a beached bass. His eyes bulged like a country bumpkins' on a first visit to the Streets of Paris.

The liquor came and Reggie made drinks for all.

"Well, well," he said. "This is a bit of it, eh?"

"Clubby," Mimi said sourly.

The strained atmosphere loosened after a few drinks. Ragore did card tricks for Mimi and got her in a better mood, and Reggie pushed fresh drinks at them whenever the need arose.

Mimi sang a song from her days in show business and then danced about the room to music from the radio. The dance was very interesting, since it proved that by clever manipulation six square inches of silk could be made to *seem* to be in two places at once.

Eventually Mimi lay on the chaise lounge with her legs across Ragore's lap, and he was fondling her hand and saying foolish things to her about undying affection.

Reggie giggled to himself and had another drink. Finally with a smothered laugh he took an object from his pocket—the slender vase in which he

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had found Ragore.

He sat down beside the chaise lounge and tugged at Mimi's sleeve. "Look, old girl," he said, brightly. "This chap here can do tricks that'll knock the old eye out. Right, Ragore?"

Ragore blushed modestly. "Not really," he said.

"He can get into this vase," Reggie said, impressively.

"Aw, g'wan," Mimi said.

"Well, he can."

"You're nuts! Get into that vase?" Mimi lay back and let out a peal of laughter. "What're you giving me? This old character do *that?*"

Ragore said stiffly, "Age is not the important factor."

"Yes, he can really do it," Reggie said.

"G'wan." Mimi swung her legs from Ragore's lap and got to her feet. "You're not out with the girl scouts, kids."

"Mimi, old girl, I wouldn't lie to you. This chap is clever."

"Well, let's see him do it then."

"Really," Ragore said, grinning and looking modestly at the floor. "I don't like to make a spectacle of myself."

"Aw, you're a faker," Mimi muttered, making herself a drink. "If you can get in the vase, *get* in." She stood in the middle of the room, swaying slightly, and staring at Ragore with sudden belligerence. "Yeah. Do it or don't. I like people who stick to their word."

"Very well," Ragore said, standing. He patted her coyly on the cheek, and said, "I'll do it, and I'll do other things you'll like later."

"Fresh," Mimi giggled.

Ragore straightened and closed his eyes and gradually his body began to shimmer and tremble. It wavered and lost its shape and Reggie saw with pleased surprise that the Genii had become transparent.

MIMI, HOWEVER, had turned to the bar at the start of the performance, and now she felt other compulsions, for she excused herself drunkenly and staggered out of the room.

Reggie took the stopper from the vase as the ectoplasmic smoke began billowing up in a thin stream, to curve finally into the mouth of the vase. Eventually the smoke disappeared and Reggie stoppered the vase with a lopsided grin.

"All shipshape?" he said.

Ragore's voice, in answer, was tiny but smug. "Oh, quite. Is Mimi impressed?"

Reggie glanced around and saw that Mimi was gone. He giggled and shook his head with mirth.

"She went to the bathroom," he said.

"Oh, I say," Ragore said, in an injured voice. "Let me out of here then."

Reggie sat down comfortably and lit a cigarette. He watched the smoke with a speculative smile.

Ragore spoke again: "Well, can you hear me? Let me out, I say."

"Hardly, old boy," Reggie said. "You made a mess of things for me, so I'm going to toss you back in the lake."

"You cad!" Ragore screamed shrilly. "You can't do that."

"Well, I'll have a try at it, anyway. Maybe I'll weigh you down with a few pounds of lead this time to keep you from bobbing around."

"No!" Ragore yelled.

"Oh, be a man about it," Reggie said sharply. "Bite the bullet, stiff upper lip and all that. Don't funk it. Sets a bad examples for the natives."

"Stop babbling," Ragore said hoarsely. "I'll do anything you say, but let me out."

"Hmmm." Reggie said. He thought

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a moment. "This car-parking scheme of yours and old Ardleigh's. Goodish deal?"

"Oh, the best. Do you want my interest? I'll sign it over gladly. I have the papers with me."

"Word of honor?"

"On my honor as a Genii."

Reggie unstoppered the bottle and while the smoke was issuing from it and forming back into Ragore's shape, he got a fountain pen from the desk and tested it with a cheerful smile. When he turned around Reggie was standing in the room, a film of perspiration on his forehead.

The Genii took a document from his inner pocket and grabbed the pen from Reggie's hand. He signed his name with trembling fingers and thrust the paper at Reggie.

"Now we're even," he said.

"Yes, I suppose so," Reggie said reluctantly. "I'm still up to my neck in the old glue because of the trick you pulled on Big Foot. He thinks *I* informed on him when it was really you." Reggie shrugged. "Well, I'll have to take my chances on that. Right now I'm going out to talk things over with my partner. That should be fun, eh?"

He dashed for the door....

Mimi came in as the door banged. She stared at Ragore with a puzzled frown. "What got into him?"

"I—I don't know," Ragore said, wiping his forehead. He stared at Mimi's smooth and practically unveiled loveliness and gradually he began to smile. "We're all alone it seems," he murmured.

"Sure enough," Mimi said, after considering the matter for a moment.

With languid grace she stretched out on the lounge. She pulled the folds of the robe across her slim bare legs with prim grace.

Ragore sat beside her with a lump in his throat like a soccer ball.

"Hey!" Mimi said suddenly. "What about the trick?"

"Trick?"

"Yeah." Mimi put her drink down. "You were going to get into that vase."

"Well, I did."

"Ha, likely story," Mimi said.

"No, I did it," Ragore insisted desperately.

"Well, do it again."

"No—no I don't want to."

"Well, that's a fine note. Do it for anybody who comes along but not for me, eh? Well, I can be mean, too."

RAGORE obviously got her point because he stood and with a resigned expression, said, "Very well, I'll do it one more time."

When his body began to shimmer and become transparent, Mimi clapped her hands excitedly. "Wonderful," she said.

The form of Ragore faded away slowly into shimmering drifting smoke, and while Mimi watched with a delighted smile, the smoke streamed into the mouth of the vase and disappeared.

"Well, that's a good one," she said, impressed.

Suddenly a closet door in the room swung open and Big Foot Maguire tip-toed swiftly across the floor to the vase. He put his banana-thick finger across his lips as Mimi started to scream, and then grabbed the wooden stopper and plunged in into the neck of the vase.

"There, you rat!" he shouted.

"Big Foot!" Mimi sobbed.

Big Foot cuffed her kindly across the mouth, and said, "Okay, okay, you're forgiven this time." He pointed dramatically at the vase. "That's the creep who tipped off the cops. It wasn't Reggie at all."

"Why the dirty bum," Mimi said.

From within the vase, a plaintive voice cried: "Let me out of here."

Big Foot laughed gleefully. He put

(Concluded On Page 148)

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(*Concluded From Page* 146)

his arm around Mimi and she began to laugh. They pointed at the vase and laughed harder, doubling over in their mirth.

"He wants to get *out!*" Big Foot bellowed.

"Character!"

They quieted down after a while and Big Foot dropped the vase into his topcoat pocket, "The boys'll take care of this," he said, casually. "You see, baby, I heard you make that date with Reggie, so I came over ahead of you. And I found out he was on the square."

"Well, everything turned out for the best," Mimi said, philosophically...

Reggie banged on the Ardleigh door with enthusiasm and when it was opened he strode into the foyer with a swagger that all three of the three Musketeers working in unison couldn't have equaled.

Deborah saw him from the second-floor landing and hurried down the curving staircase with a worried frown on her otherwise delightful face.

"Ha!" cried Reggie, jubilantly. "Ho!"

"Do stop bellowing like you're driving a mule train," Deborah said. "What's wrong with you?"

The door of the study opened with a crash and old man Ardleigh stamped into the foyer.

"Can't you come in like a human being?" he roared. "Every time you enter this house it sounds like we're being sacked by an armored division."

Reggie took the document he'd gotten from Ragore from his pocket and with an elaborately casual gesture, handed it to old man Ardleigh. Then he chuckled and put his arm about Deborah's waist.

"Reggie, what is it?" she whispered.

Old man Ardleigh read the document with bulging eyes and a steadily reddening flush. Finally he gazed at Reggie with a horrible look.

"We're *partners!*" he gasped.

"Yes, and I control fifty one per cent of the stock," Reggie said grandly.

"Oh, Reggie," Deborah cried.

"Now," Reggie said, fixing a sternish eye on Mr. Ardleigh. "What have you to say?"

Mr. Ardleigh studied Reggie for several seconds and then he beamed and slapped him heartily on the back.

"I say let's have a drink," he said cheerfully.

Together they walked into the study and Ardleigh got out the brandy while Reggie embraced Deborah and mused on the mysteries of the capitalistic system. Why, he was thinking to himself, all a chap needed was a few million of the old ready, and everybody treated him like a king.

He kissed Deborah and decided it was a wonderful country.

THE END

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"THE DEVIL WITH YOU!"

By ROBERT BLOCH

The manager of the Hotel Flopmoor had a good reason for wanting to get rid of his job. It seemed that the annual convention of the Society of Magicians was about to take place. It had taken place before—and always with weird results that gave the hotel a haunted reputation! Be sure and reserve your copy now!

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What is Indecency in a Book?

OR WHO IS OBSCENE?

As a great defender of books in our courts asks more pungently in the title of a recent book of his.

America suffers of a vast variety of censorships—state, federal, local—

But the most insidious of all censors we have found is the average American bookdealer himself.

When we first brought to him James Joyce's ULYSSES he held up his hands in pious horror. A few years later, when the book was D. H. Lawrence's LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER, he held up his nose as well as his hands. He sells *both of them* now that they have become modern classics.

The same reception was accorded our reprint of Charles-Louis Philippe's BUBU OF MONTPARNASSE. Even Nobel Prize Winner T. S. Eliot's *Introduction* didn't help. For the bookdealer this great work remains nothing more than a chronicle of the lives of men and women who make up the sidewalk traffic of Paris.

When, more recently, we came to the bookdealer with Michael Sadleir's FORLORN SUNSET the delicacy had become class-delicacy. This great author's previous work, *Fanny By Gaslight*—which concerned itself with the predominately vicious amusements of the rich—was allowed to be pyramided into best-sellerdom. Because FORLORN SUNSET shows with great care the effect of this overwhelming sensualism on the lives of the poor the censorial hands and noses went up again.

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READER'S PAGE

IT SAYS HERE...
Dear Mr. Hamling:

This is my first letter to any science fiction magazine, so if I stick my neck out with some fantastic remark you know why. Also, there is an even better excuse: I'm still a novice who has been reading this stuff for only about two years. Paul Ganley, in a letter published in the April issue of AMAZING STORIES, asked that you junk the stereotyped salutation of "Sirs:". I heartily agree with him, and think that FA should also. One question first. What does the "t" in stf stand for?

Now to the stories in the April issue. First place goes to "The Face Beyond The Veil", second to "Don't Come to Mars", third to "He Took It with Him", which, because of its ending, comes in just ahead of "The Lunar Point of View". The other stories were fair, nothing bad but nothing remarkably good. I like Tenneshaw's story better than "Queen of the Ice Men", which appeared in the November issue, but I don't think it compared with "Diana and the Golden Ring".

Here are a few remarks directed to Morton Paley. About the novels, one mediocre novel is much better than several mediocre shorts. A novel can, because of its length, encompass several ideas, whereas a short has time for only one small point. To dispute where the earth would go if the moon hit it, there are several factors beside Newton's third law of motion that enter into the matter. First, there is that little equation that equals f equals ma. This means that if the mass of the moon is about 1/5 that of the earth, the initial acceleration of the earth would theorically be 1/5 that of the moon when it hit, since, assuming the transfer of force to be perfect, the acceleration is inversely proportional to the mass. Second, the force or momentum, which is a function of the velocity squared, which in turn is a function of distance, with which the moon struck the earth would vary with its initial distance from the earth. Third, there is the complication of a vector problem. When two forces act in different directions on a moving body, the body's resultant speed and direction are equal to the resultant of the two forces. One more point, as the speed of an object approaches the speed of light, the mass approaches zero. Therefore, I believe that no matter from what direction or at what speed the moon might have struck the earth, the earth's inertia plus the gravitational attraction of the sun would have put the earth right back in its orbit.

If this letter gets published, is it okay to say hello to Phil, a long-standing fan of FA and AS, who was my rooommate at one time?

Allen May
1618 Market Street
Lewisburg, Pa.

First of all, you will note that your suggestion on the salutation in the Reader's Page has been followed. Who says we don't listen to our readers! We'll print them as you write them. About the moon-earth mathematics—we'll leave that up to the gang. Should provide a bit of comment. How about it?.....Ed.

THE EMINENT C.T.B.
Dear Bill:

Avoiding the conventional usage of "Dear Editor" or just plain "Sirs", 'tis best to use just plain Bill to avoid monotony.

To begin with, the April 1950 ish of FA certainly had what it takes to present a great issue. By that, I wish to point out the very significant fact that none of the stories were overlong, which was quite welcome for a change, and I feel that every so often, a "special" edition compiled mostly of shorts and novelettes would be welcome along with other issues presenting the long and powerful novels.

But, though the April ish was fine, I choked with a lump in my throat when I found ol' Rog Phillips (Graham) taking a powder this time. He has been a standby and regular contributor, and I might add, an excellent author, and little doubt that he *IS* one of the greatest in the STFantasy field today. However, most pleasing was the presentation of "The Face Beyond The Veil", by Frank Bahl, a new author I believe, and one with fine potentialities in becoming well-liked for the manner he has in being able to present fantasy in such a fine story-telling manner. "The Living Vortex", by Stan Mullen, was an excellent long short, or short-long story... wouldn't have minded if it went on for another 10,000 words the way it started out... and *THAT* seems to be one of the major problems that I've come up against scores of times that I have read certain short-

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story forms; either they are plain crude all the way through or else they are so good that one is sorry that he has to finish them.

"The Chalice of Circe", by Will Hawkins, was in the "weird-horror" category and something I've had too long a time to wait and see in FA. I, for one, am glad that you are gradually swerving away from the alleged "esoteric-spiritual" form of yarns, which became almost a religion during the past of both FA and AS. Keep this standard going.

"Don't Come to Mars", by Henry Hasse, was OK, and though strictly in the Ray Bradbury manner, I feel that no one has the top priority on any theme or style of story if one can do it as well as any other author, on the basis of originality, of course.

I could go on and comment on the following little classics, such as: "Isolationist", "He Took It With Him", "The Lunar Point of View", "Call of Duty", "Blueprint for Destruction", all of which were highly enjoyable and without the taint of "hackiness" to stigmatize them for the Gripes Committee.

Next on the old agenda, I was almost hysterically overjoyed to see that the "Reader's Page" wasn't two pages or three, nor four, but FIVE! This is and always will be one of my favorite steady features and anything that goes into its improvement will surely make my STFic eyes gleam with sedate rapture. Anent the letters: The best one used, was of course, the one written by that eminent scholar and eminent club director, one C. T. Beck by name. Let's have more letters from him . . . let's!

And between breaths of flabbergasted consternation over Mr. Beck's temerity in using the pages of FA to opine his announcements, let me sneak in an announcement anent the fact that having several hundred old and mint STFantasy mags (and scores of books) in my collection, I wish to dispose of same to any willing collector interested in trading with me copies of ASTOUNDING and UNKNOWN that I have need for. Other forms of STFantasy mags and certain pre-'44 Arkham books, etc., are also wanted. I wish to make a particular stipulation that I am not interested in any mags over 1945, especially ASTOUNDINGS, though there is definite need for the latter, and all AMAZINGS and FA's prior to '45.

Calvin Thos. Beck
Pres., Science-Fantasy Society
P. O. Box 877
Grand Central Station
New York 17, N. Y.

Rog Phillips hasn't deserted your favorite magazine, Cal. Matter of fact, we've got some top yarns coming up shortly by Rog. Watch for them.....Ed.

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THE NEW EDITORIAL...
Dear Ed:

I think FA is still ahead of AS somewhat, both still keeping their respective distance despite their surge upward in quality in the past few months. The April 1950 issues of both were good, but FA had a better variety of stories and, I think, somewhat better stories. Let's dissect them, shall we?

First, and featuring a nice MacCauley pic (spoiled by poor plates, smudgy ink, etc.) is Franklin Bahl's "Face Beyond the Veil" which was a good attempt. This fellow shows promise but he can improve a lot. The idea of the story was good; he had some nice gimmicks but some of his logic and dialogue was just impossible! That little inter-change on pages 16-17 was utterly idiotic! Here they are within range almost of a dangerous space pirate and they exchange an inane byplay like this! The characterizations were pretty good in general. But best was when Bea-Anna just simply left, went, vamoosed, etc., and left them wanting. The story should've ended *there*! Then, with that unconvincing character, Zaney, Dave goes off to almost certain death after a woman he can never have! Silly, what? Otherwise the story was good! Try again Frank old man. This was good all right, but next time...?

It was nice to see another Mullen story. He injected some atmosphere into this story. The striving of Vardee to conquer the raging vortex was striking writing. Then the scene where they discovered the vortex to be living has that atmosphere of the alienness of the unknown which I'd like to sell in FA more often. More please.

The basic idea for "The Chalice of Circe" was very good. I doubt if ever this idea has been used as a basis for a story before. Though not serious writing, exactly, it was entertaining (and that's the main idea, isn't it?). The title of the story was not fitting, though. The chalice played a minor part. But this is also a minor criticism, so let's go onward.

Glad to see Henry Hasse writing again. This is, I think his second story of his come-back. Nice idea, too. Especially the ending where they *didn't* go to Mars anyway, despite the warning. Some authors would've had them disregard the warning. In fact, Man is like that, to do such a thing, I mean.

I don't know whether I could say Mack Reynolds' story is the best in this issue or not. A good satire on Man, as it is anyway. That character had some right ideas about present-day culture. We are rushing like blazes all the time, but we're simply hurrying to our grave or the psycho; either is as bad as the other...

Clark Collins had a very good bat-you-in-the-teeth ending story. Very, very good. Served the mean old miser right (is the attitude, I presume). It looks like the shorts are taking top honors this time.

"The Lunar Point of View" looked promising and did turn out to be good, but not as good as expected. Enjoyable though. Same old problem in a new setting, dressed up pertly and well presented.

"Call of Duty" harked back to the more space-opera type story, and that isn't bad. Some chunks of sex thrown in, not quite by the hair of the haid, I notice. But Emmett McDowell can do it better...

Lyle Burk's detective-story-dressed-with-futuristic-setting wasn't too bad. But I had that I've-been-here-before feeling...

Illustrations this time were adequate albeit not outstanding. Now that you do have MacCauley illustrating, how about letting him work on some covers?

I noticed, as you suggested, that the fillers *are* much more interesting. I actually *read* the things now! Some of them are almost plots that could be used for stories, especially the one on page 156. Nice to see an interesting and informative Editor's Page, too. The discussion on books is quite enlightening as to the various views. I am not especially against reprints being stopped for awhile yet. Being limited-edition publishers, they had to have something that would be sure to sell, at least for a few years, so they could get on their feet financially. The bigger percentage of readers and collectors of stfantasy recognized and appreciated the older pulp classics and an almost assured sale was welcome. Naturally, this field of small companies is still in its infancy, when comparing it to the pulps of s-f. It was probably taken for granted that someday, the reprint material was sure to run out. As it is, there are more books than the average fan can keep up with right now! And it must surely be taxing the collectors' funds! Also, there is a wide variety to suit all fans and collectors' tastes. Most titles are at least known to the potential buyers whereas new material wouldn't be. But I'm NOT adverse to having my $3.00 a throw going for original novels, not at all.

It is also nice to see a more lengthy "Reader's Page", too. It is always nice to see other opinions and ideas. It also shows that the readers take an active interest in the magazine. In the letters, I notice quite a controversy concerning a Shaver story in which the moon bouncing was allegedly lifted from a previous story. If this story is "When the Moon Bounced", it was a *good* story, but *its* plot may well have been lifted from Francis Ashton's "The Breaking of the Seals". However, as Paul Ganley or Morton D. Paley states, the moon would've broken up due to the gravitic strains. Although, broken or not, the landing of the moon on the earth would certainly cause some... uhh... damage!

While still on this moon-falling theory, all of the above mentioned stories are very much outdated by "When the Moon Fell" which appeared way back in the early thirties and was written by Morrisson Colliday. This was one of the first s-f stories I ever read, come to think of it. Anybody

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else know of an earlier moon-falling story? The main idea of this paragraph is: Don't be too hasty with plagiarist accusations, boys!

I guess this is all for this issue. In fact, quite enough; I didn't intend it to be so long at all, Mr. Editor, but when you're inspired to write so much, it must be a good sign as to the interest of the magazine! Until next time then...

Ed Cox
4 Spring Street
Lubec, Maine

We're glad you like the new type features, Ed, and your approval of our recent editorial is appreciated. On that subject—if you will recall, we did not state that we felt reprints never should have been introduced into the book field—we said that it was our opinion that they had done their job and now the time was ripe for new, original material. As to Frank Bahl's yarn, how about it, Frank—any comments? ..... Ed.

BOUNCING MOON FINALE
Dear Editor:

April, all in all, was a good issue. No earth-shaking classics, and no poor yarns. More of McDowell, deCourcy, Phillips, St. Reynard and Francis, please. And we want more J. Allen St. John illustrations!

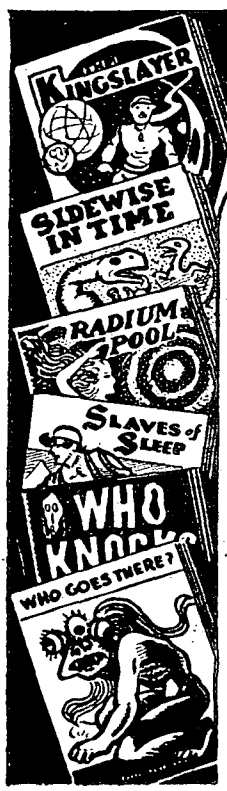
Now on to the rebounding moon question. I stand aghast at Ganley's eloquence. How can you have a feud when there is no apparent chink in your opponent's verbal armor? I cannot say the same for one Morton D. Paley, however.

Thinkest ye, friend Morton, that Newton's law did not occur to me even as I read the "Cyclopeans"? But what would happen if fantasy fans went around applying facts, laws and equations to all the stories they read? How long would the science-fiction and fantasy magazines last?

It is definitely fantastic to think that the moon could have bounced, for all the reasons you and W. Paul, the Ganley have named, and for several more—but this is FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, is it not?

I hope Alexander Blade's conspicuous absence from your pages is a sign that he's at work on a novel—perhaps one to take its place next to the immortal "The Brain".

Before I go, I'd like to say thanks for printing such a magnificent yarn as Sturgeon's "Dreaming Jewels". Only one thing I have to say against this novel: I can't find anything particularly disgusting about eating ants. If Sturgeon wanted to have his hero do something disgusting, he could have used more imagination—for instance, have his his hero do something *really* horrible, like cracking his knuckles...



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Brian McNaughton
198 Bergen Place
Red Bank, N. J.

We think your opinion rather sums up the Moon Bouncing controversy. After all, this is FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. Things happen in our pages that could—or could not—depending on the individual viewpoint, occur in real life. In the final analysis, one can't prove a given stf idea to satisfy a majority. We're here for entertainment. However, we'll stick our necks out and say that we personally feel that a lot of the things we print are in the realm of possibility... As to those cracking knuckles—help! ..... Ed.

HE WANTS NOVELS
Sirs:

I was very much disappointed when I bought the April issue of FA. There was no novel, but as soon as I read "The Face Beyond the Veil" I forgave all. More of Franklin Bahl's stories should be used. Next came "He Took It With Him", "Don't Come to Mars", "The Chalice of Circe", "The Living Vortex", "The Lunar Point of View", "Call of Duty", "Blueprint For Destruction", and "Isolationist". I was glad to hear that there was going to be a Toffee story in June.

A. Roberts
201 West 68 Street
New York, N. Y.

You've got another novel this month. And how did you like the "Toffee" story?. Ed.

OF COMPETITORS AND THINGS...
Dear Mr. Hamling:

Some fan has given me a lot of abuse for a few of my remarks in my last letter. Where I mentioned "Don Stuart's 'Who Goes There?' a few years ago" he called me four kinds of neophyte. Well, I've only been in fandom two years and have been publishing a fanzine (SPACESHIP—five cents) for one year, but I've got enough sense to not mention the name of a rival editor and the date of the magazine in another magazine's letter. So, I didn't say that "Who Goes There?" was really written by John Campbell under his famous nom-de-plume and appeared in ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION for August, 1938. Neophyte, eh?...

Now to the bizness on hand. I was astounded—whoops, that adjective!—amazed to see FA appearing on the 13th of the month! Only three days after AMAZING! It made sort of a drain on my finances, especially with the fan auction of the Queens S-F League in between, but, I like the earlier publication. There were obviously some wires crossed in the current issue: the first 62 pages were in the very nice new type, the last hundred in the old style. How about 196 pages for FA? Jones' cover was, of course, very colorful and nice. How about some cover appearances by the pre-war cover artists? I mean Rod Ruth and Bob Fuqua, who did such a fine cover on the first issue of FA in May, 1939. I'd like to see what Bill Terry could do with oils, also.

A suggestion: how about changes such as dropping the "All Stories Complete" on page 4 and substituting, in smaller type, "The Best in New Fantastic Fiction"?

As for the stories in the present (April) issue—"The Face Beyond the Veil" was dull, boring and worthless. I struggled through the first fifteen pages and skipped the rest. Otherwise, the stories weren't too bad. I liked "The Chalice of Circe" about the best, though Hawkins neatly sidestepped the problem of offending your many extraterrestrial readers by calling off the show before Mary could win. Why no Atlan and Nor entries? Strike: Willard Hawkins unfair to Federated Brotherhood of Deros, Titans, Atlans, Nortans and Shaverians, Local ZDFA 123456. Discrimination!

"Isolationist" still has me shivering. Ditto "He Took It With Him", which reminded me a bit of Rog Phillips. Allerton should go back to MAMMOTH WESTERN. He can't write s-f. The short-shorts are improving.

Next: The letter-column. It's improving.

I don't think the moon-bouncing story from May, 1949, AS, deserves all this panning. I liked it. I also like letters of Cal Beck and the ever-present Ganley. W. Robert Moore of the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC has just spent a year in Africa, so I guess he can't be Bob Williams. Just coincidence about the names. Correct me on stating St. Reynard was unknown outside of FA. He appeared in the 1945 issue of ASTOUNDING. Does anyone have a copy of March '47 FA in good shape? Mine has no cover. I note three of the letter-writers called "The Usurpers" a classic. Such agreement! Your previews of coming stories (a Toffee novel and the madman's brain) have me drooling. Hope I'm not disappointed.

Bob Silverberg
760 Montgomery Street
Brooklyn 13, New York

Come, come, Bob, you don't have to be afraid to mention a rival publication or editor's name in FA. We'll go even further and admit that we read John Cambell's yarn way back when and like it ourselves! As to the change in type in the issue you speak of, we converted to a neater, easier to read face, and ran the last of the old style type that month. Do you like it?. Ed.

MORE FANTASY IN FA
Sirs:

I have been reading your magazine FANTASTIC ADVENTURES for about

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ten years and up until recently have been more than satisfied with the type of stories you have been publishing. However, all your recent issues are devoted almost exclusively to space travel and the various planets. In fact, your April issue, with the exception of "He Took It With Him", was entirely made up of this type of yarn. Most of these stories are the cops and robbers type, or wars with ray guns. They're so similar I don't even bother to finish them anymore. Can't you go back to the real fantastic type of story?

Stories like "Forever is Too Long", and "The Involuntary Immortals", are excellent and I would like to see more of them. And I'm hoping for a sequel to "The Man From Yesterday".

The shorter type stories are better than the over-long novel, as I believe most people who pick up a magazine are in search of short stories.

Sorry my first letter had to register a complaint, but you know how it is; as long as everything is going along fine we all drift along and enjoy it, but when it looks like something we enjoy very much is going to change, we sit up and holler. I do hope you will keep FANTASTIC ADVENTURES the same as it used to be, and not change over to science fiction.

Henrietta McGee
Woodhaven, L. I.

You'll be finding a good deal of solid fantasy in FA from now on. But as to the type of story you like, the three you mention are actually in the science-fiction category. Or do you simply mean by "fantastic" a food-for-thought yarn of science and fantasy flavor?..... Ed.

FANTASTIC WEIRD STORIES?
Sirs:

I've been reading your FA for about three years. I would rather you go back to fantasy instead of so much science. I would like to have some stories without so much *science* because I can't understand lots of it.

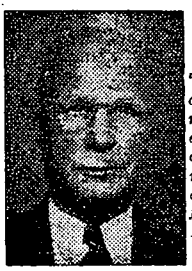
Better still, how about publishing a new magazine with *just* weird stories. How about it fans?

Mrs. Mary Bitters
6552 Cottage Grove
Chicago 37, Illinois

We try to publish as much fantasy as possible—the real down-to-earth type. What about the recent lead stories? On the question of weird type yarns, what do you other readers say? Do you like werewolves and vampires?..... Ed.

A GREAT STORY—AND ISSUE
Dear Editor:

"The World of the Lost" by Paul Lohrman was great! On a par with some of



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Shaver's earliest stories. It ends like (Shaver's) later stories, on a note of "could be???". I hope Paul will write some more stories. Maybe, if Paul *isn't* a pen-name of Dick, then *maybe* we can have more of his stories.

"Diana and the Golden Ring" by S. M. Tenneshaw, was second to TWOFL. Then came "Detour from Tomorrow" by Rog Phillips, taking third place. "Mr. Destiny Follows Through" by Gilbert Grant took fourth, in my estimation, and tying for fifth is "Inoculation" by Roger Flint Young and "The Girl From Mars" by Robert Bloch.

Gee whiz, fellow, what's up with FA? You've got AS nearly 200 pages, but FA still hasn't caught up. How about giving it a push, A BIG PUSH, so it can also soon be "nearly 200 pages of the best of stf and fantasy fiction"? How about getting some of the *real good* artists back at work on the illos and covers of FA and AS? The artist that *used* to work for Ziff-Davis. You've still a couple of fair ones, but they can't compare to the really *great* artists you *used* to have. Gawsh! Krupa and Terry and Rod Ruth are fair, but you all know the *best* are Finlay and Jones, and Ruth and Bergey.

Is "The Ancient Geometrical Monument"—known as "TAGM" in AS going to be completed? I hope so. Also, I sure hope you'll bring back some of those grand stories, that is, some more *great stories* by great authors, like "The Green Man" and "The Green Man Returns", "Prometheus II" and "Armageddon". I don't know, at the moment that is, who wrote these fine stories, but they, I believe, are now some of stf fantasy classics, and I surely hope the new FA and AS will have some of such high calibre as these in your new and improved mags.

Paul Glen Wright
RFD No. 2 Lake Road
LeRoy, New York

Of the four artists you list as favorites we'll follow along on the first three. They are good. But we also feel that our other artists wield a fair brush also. And as for great stories, what about this month's lead novel? .....*Ed.*

A CLASSIC SHORT STORY

Sirs:

I think that Clark Collins' short story, "He Took It With Him", was one of the best tales I've ever read in FA. Anyone compiling an anthology of the best stf tales printed in 1950 can't afford to ignore this little gem. I hope that you will publish more of Mr. Collins' stories in future issues.

The touchstone of science is prescience—the power to forsee. "He Took It With Him" amalgamates that touchstone with the adventures of a fictitious character in fictitious setting, and is, thereby, an excellent example of what is meant by the term science fiction.

Frank Smith
612 Banner Avenue
Brooklyn 24, N. Y.

Anthologists take note.....*Ed.*

A TOAST TO PHILLIPS

Sirs:

I have read the latest issue (March) of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, and I have a few comments to make.

I was glad to see "World of the Lost" written by Paul Lohrman. Easily the best story of all was Robert Bloch's "Girl From Mars". It had, to me, a totally unexpected, end. It had a good deal of suspense that was helpful in improving the story. Bloch has a fine style and he has written many swell stories; I still remember his "Strictly From Mars" which was out of this world.

"Detour from Tomorrow" was a very good story by a very good author, Rog Phillips. Phillips has been doing quite a lot of writing lately both under his own name and numerous pseudonyms. Despite the fact that he is so prolific none of the quality of the stories seems to suffer. Whether Phillips turns out a hundred stories per year or one, they are all good.

Did I already tell you that my initiation into science fiction came with Rog Phillips' classic "So Shall Ye Reap"? If I haven't, I am.

"Detour from Tomorrow" presented quite an interesting concept. I like Phillips' varying approaches to different stories; he must stay up at nights thinking up different angles, I bet.

Dave Hammond
806 Oak Street
Runnemede, N. J.

We'll go right along with you, Dave, and say that we feel Rog is a top writer too. The fact that he sells practically all the other markets in the field would tend to prove this. —But he's still our discovery and a favorite son! So you'll be seeing his yarns frequently.....*Ed.*

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FABLES FROM THE FUTURE

By LEE OWENS

MAGNETIC BOMB!

"I DON'T like it, Frank," Jim Lenning said to his companion. He turned to the visi-plate and squinted at its graduations more closely. "That baby is gaining on us."

Frank shrugged.

"What are we going to do? I've tried to raise them with a radio beam. They don't answer."

"Why should they?" Jim said viciously, "they know what's aboard. Somebody at the Martian station must have blabbed that we had seven hundred thousand credits worth of *panar*. Imagine what the stuff would do to the illicit drug trade."

Frank looked worried. "We don't have any weapons. We can't fight them. And we're out of beacon range of a patrol station. I think we're caught."

Jim looked thoughtfully at the dot of the ship on the visi-plate.

"Maybe not," he said softly, "maybe not."

Jim left Frank at the controls while he went back to the power room at the stern of the slim rocket. As he passed the cargo chambers holding the powerful drug destined for the government medical agency, he felt almost despairing. Not only would that disappear along with their eight months' work, but the vicious criminal world would get its hands on the most powerful and potent maddening drug known to man throughout the System.

Frank watched the ever-growing dot flying a straight-line course behind them, straight as an arrow following in their wake.

He was still staring hopelessly at the screen when a half hour later Jim came into the control room. Jim was dragging a clumsy-looking sheet metal box which appeared quite heavy across the ribbed metal floor.

"I think this may do the trick, Frank," he said. Now there was a grin on his face. "If it doesn't, too bad. If it does..." He left the unfinished sentence hanging in mid-air.

Frank looked puzzled. "What is it?" he asked.

"That baby," Jim said proudly, "is a magnetic mine. It's crude and simple but it may do the trick. I'm going to dump it out the lock. It has a heavy, power-packed coil in it with a lot of junk iron. You've

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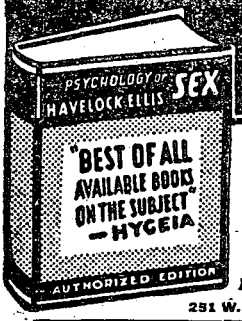

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noticed that this baby is tailing us hell bent in a strictly linear course. Won't they be surprised to find themselves running right smack into about two hundred pounds of metal! It'll split them wide open."

Frank was staring open-mouthed.

"Brother!" he said finally, "when I think how they're traveling!" Suddenly he burst out: "But what about kicking it toward them? If you dump out the mine it'll just cling to us."

"I'm going to jettison right through the rear rocket tubes," Jim answered calmly. "That'll give it a nice velocity component in their direction. O.K.?"

Frank grinned. "That's it boy. Let's dump 'er."

The two of them lugged the heavy mine back toward the rear rocket tubes. In the power room, Frank gingerly swung open a lock and slipped the heavy missile into the cavity with Jim's help. Then both went back to the control room and waited.

"About seven minutes will tell the tale," Frank said, putting down the pencil and scratch paper, "assuming the velocity I think they've got."

Grimly, intently they watched the screen. For minutes there was no change except the imperceptibly slight increase in angular size of the unknown space-ship bent on capturing them.

The magnetic mine drifted astern, its velocity close to that of the rocket jet which had ejected. it. This was measured in a fantastic figure. Its magnetic field reached out and embraced the steel sliver looming up to meet it. The magnetic fingers touched; then in the mysterious fashion of electromagnetism, tautened and the mine deviated slightly in its course, deviated only so much as to assure its being in an exactly straight line when it struck.

Jim and Frank, watching the screen nervously almost missed the action in the blink of an eye—it happened so fast. The two hundred pound mass of metal struck at a devastating velocity the grosser mass of the pursing space-ship. On the screen they saw a brilliant flash, a coruscant, pulsing flare of light that vanished as abruptly as it began.

And all that was left in space was a few shattered droplets of still-cooling molten metal...

★ ★ ★

SHANGHAIED...

C-OFFICER Fane Thurmond puffed slowly on a cigarette as he walked along the docking area. It was a calm peaceful night, even attractive here among the metallic cylinders, the squat powerhouses, the shabby housing. But then, he shrugged philosophically, weren't all rocket launching areas the same?

Tomorrow, he'd ship out for the Nep-

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tunian run. Good communications men were in demand. He could choose his berth. How they howled for skilled help down at the shipping offices. He had to laugh the way the employment agencies would badger technicians to join this rocket or that.

Suddenly he had an uneasy feeling. It was the vaguest premonition of danger. Maybe that swishing sound—crash!—even as blackness descended on Communications Officer Thurmond, he thought of the grim sign hanging in the offices, "Danger—Shanghaiers—Avoid Dock Areas at Night!"

Then all went black.

Fane awoke with a groan. His head felt like a puffed balloon. He sat up and with eyeball-searing effort managed to open his lids. But it wasn't necessary to look. He could feel where he was. A faint shudder and vibration went through him. The hum and purr of gynos keened through him. He was aboard ship and he knew he'd been taken for a ride.

The door opened and a huge, heavy-shouldered man stepped in. His cap bore the universal insignia of a space-captain—three stars.

"Sorry, fellow," the powerful visitor said casually, "but we had to have a C-Officer. I paid good credits to a shanghai-gang. Well, they got me the real McCoy. I examined your papers." He grinned.

Bitterly Fane faced him. He spoke in a low, intense tone.

"You've got me. I know it. But I don't have to work for you."

"You'll work, friend," the man said coldly, and a small pistol appeared in his hand. "All you've got to do is to maintain equipment. We'll do any broadcasting on the vidi-screens or the radio. And there'll be somebody at your back all the time. Don't try anything funny and you'll get paid just like the rest of the officers and crew. Act up and..." He left the implied threat unfinished.

As good as his word, the captain set a watch-dog over Fane, and he spent his time going over the equipment, adjusting and maintaining the delicate, complicated electrical circuits. It was not difficult work and the primary reason he had been shanghaied, he knew, was because all System ships were required by law to retain a C-Officer.

He had no chance to get near the input end of a transmitter. And always the guard was at his back with strict orders to conk him at the first suspicious move. The guard was somewhat of an amateur radioman himself and Fane did not find it easy to deceive him.

Fane wracked his mind to think of some technique whereby he could slip a message through to the monitors of the frequencies. But no chance came.

He was in for a good seven weeks trip because the vessel was Pluto bound with a cargo of expensive heavy machinery.

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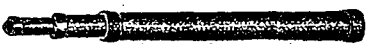

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Fane chafed under the forced restriction.

Then it happened. Just outside the Jovian lanes, a Callistan patrol boarded them for a routine inspection. Fane spotted the vessel, a slim patrol needle, through the quartzite port of his cabin. Quickly he picked up a flashlight and sent a coded message through the port. He used the unfamiliar Morse hoping someone aboard the patrol vessel would by chance understand...

The fuming captain watched the patrolmen take his shanghaied C-Officer off his vessel fifteen minutes later.

"Are you going to prefer charges, Officer Thurmond?" the patrol captain asked as they went toward the airlock of the freighter, the angry ship's captain following in the wake, unable to do any explaining.

"I'll just slap a judgment of fifteen thousand credits against the owners of the ship," Fane answered, his anger dissipated by his quick and fortuitous rescue. "They'll chew out the captain proper."

"Captain," the patrol officer said to the ship's captain, "You don't realize how fortunate you are. If this man chose to prefer criminal charges against you, you could get twenty years. I think your owners will take care of you in other ways."

Fane walked aboard the patrol vessel, once more a free C-Officer. It felt good. Shanghai-ing in space wasn't especially to his liking—not in deep space....

★ ★ ★

WHIRLING DERVISH!

IT'S THE little things that make the difference, though we don't usually notice it. Nine-tenths of the advancements and progressive steps of our time are due to apparently trivial insignificant little inventions—that all of a sudden—total up into startling changes.

The perfect example of this, is the "torque converter". Ever since the invention of the gasoline engine and the electric motor people have been looking for some sort of method of connecting these extremely important gadgets to their machines and vehicles. While the problem hasn't been so critical with the electric motor, it's still a problem. As for the gas engine, well, that's been a permanent trouble.

The common solution has been the mechanical clutch. You've got a shaft to be turned. So what do you do? You connect a friction plate to it and a friction plate to your motor, let the two come together and the shaft starts spinning—in other words, you've got the clutch.

But as anyone knows, who has driven a car, the clutch is a troublesome thing easily subject to disorder and given to jerkiness and slipperiness. Not so many years ago in Europe, somebody thought

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of a neat way of harnassing the power of spinning oil to this problem, eliminating the clutch completely. We're mighty familiar with this invention in the form of "hydromatic", "Dynaflow" etc. As big a boon as this has been to automobiles, it will prove as important to other phases of industry.

The operation, basically, is simple. Put a fan on both your shaft and your motor. Bury the two in oil and spin the motor. Bang!—the oil starts to spin too. This sets the fan on the shaft into rotation. The result is that you've got a smooth, jerkless, easy torque transmitter. So far on cars it's proven to be a priceless asset.

But in many other branches of industry the same effect is useful. In addition somebody has thought up the idea of changing the density of "squishiness" of the oil by mixing it with tiny particles of iron powder and subjecting it to a magnetic field. This set-up works even better than the "fluid drive", because such minute control of the "clutching" action can be had.

Now you might say, "so what?" Are these things really important? The answer is a positive and loud "yes!" In a million indirect and many direct ways, you'll realize the benefits of things like these. Already it appears that this fluid drive arrangement will be an important part of the helicoptor which assuredly is the vehicle of the future. In all sorts of machines and instruments these torque converters will appear. They usually manifest themselves in the form of a better cheaper product.

Yes, the miracles of the scientific world lie in the little things as well as in the big ones. That's for sure...

★ ★ ★

THE COOKIE-TOSSER

FORGIVE AN old man for reminiscing, but sometimes you can't help it. I've spent a good portion of my life in deep space, "man and boy" as they used to say, for almost forty years, and there's little I haven't seen. I won't be going aboard a "can" much longer, I know, but the fire of the rockets is in my blood. That's why I was glad to hop the Martian run the other day.

I made the trip aboard a passenger tub called the "Callypso", and I had to laugh at the way they kid-gloved the passengers and even the crew! Would you believe it, but now they give everybody a shot of sodium diethylamilene! The doc said to me, "C'mon, old-timer. You won't get space-nausea with a shot of this." Well, I took it—I had to—but I could have laughed in the man's face. I haven't had "the cookie-toss" for the length of my life—and this young doc makes me take the anti-sickness drug.

Anyhow—don't be impatient, youngster, I'll get to the point as I go along—the in-

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cident brought to mind my cadet days aboard the "Warrior". I remember clearly, even today, how we young ones, new to space, made our virgin trip. I can still see us filing into the *Warrior*, that half-scared look masked by a bravado and toughness we damned well didn't feel.

But it wasn't bad then. We started out with a full grav, and the result was that nobody was particularly affected by the nausea of weightlessness, which is something you either are immune to, you become accustomed to, or you never conquer.

Well, we had a bad actor aboard, a punk by the name of Lesson. I'll never forget him. He was a smart fellow, and consequently they gave him a sub-officer rank. But he took advantage of his position to make life miserable.

Everybody aboard, except the officers, hated him, and we cadets would have liked to kill him—but he had rank. He drove us furiously, never for a moment taking it easy. The hatred he built up was so thick you could feel it. He was a novice, same as we, but from his actions, you'd have thought he'd been in space all his life. He was clever too—he never let the C.O. or for that matter, anyone but the junior officer of the watch—who was a rat too—see him pull this hazing stuff.

But one day, we suddenly went "free". The Captain cut the rockets—I guess we'd come up to velocity—and there we hung in space—gravity-less. For a newcomer—for most newcomers on any space-can, the sheer paralyzing nausea of gravity-less flight can't be described.

A hideous nausea racking seizes most—there are a few immune ones and I'm one of them—but you should have seen Lesson. Cadet Officer Lesson was giving me his particular brand of hell when the rocket went free. My stomach did a couple of flip-flops, but I felt all right even though the weird sensation of floating left me a little shaken.

But Lesson!—his lower jaw dropped until it almost hit the floor—his eyes bulged, a strangled scream came from his throat, and I moved fast! I had to. The violent green of his face was matched only by Terran grass. Cadet Officer Lesson, choked and spluttered, thrashing about in agony as the fierce wretchings of nausea seized him and wrenched him inside out.

I think we loved the sight almost sadistically—those of us who were able to—and Lesson changed in that moment, from a little tyrant, to a man who thinks he's going to die. Eventually the worst of the pangs passed, but the man was never cut out for deep space—the nausea gripped him too strongly.

He was discharged on the return trip for his disability, but none of us were sorry. Deep space weeds out the men from the boys—remember that, even though they use the anti-nausea dope!

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$15.20 an hour!

This is the average earning reported by Presto salesman WILLIAM F. WYDALLIS. "The sky's the limit" on Presto profits because of America's serious need for this new fire extinguishing discovery.

WOULDN'T YOU like to be making the kind of money William F. Wydallis is making? His story (printed at right) is just one example of the brilliant success that Presto salesmen are meeting everywhere! A Florida salesman earned $600 in one month. An Ohio man earned $2100 in 2 months. A New York salesman earned $1500 in one month. A New Hampshire salesman added the Presto as a *sideline* and picked up an extra $1800 in 20 months.

What Is the Secret?

PRESTO contains an amazing new chemical—"Chlorobromomethane" or "C.B." developed as a secret defense against fire during the war.

In comparing effectiveness of "C.B." in fighting various kinds of fires Dow Chemical Company's report states: "It has been proved that *'C.B.' is about 1.5 to 6 times as effective as other common extinguishing agents on an equal weight basis.*"

This extra effectiveness of "C.B." means that Presto can be made light and handy enough for even a woman or child to use. Just a twist of the knob . . . and flames disappear! "Sells on sight" to owners of homes, cars, stores, farms, service stations, boats, motorcycles, factories, offices.

Why Large Presto Profits Are So Easy

Everyone is terrified at the very *thought* of *FIRE! Every year* fire kills more than 11,000 people. Most people who see Presto in action want one or more—ESPECIALLY WHEN THE PRICE IS ONLY $3.98 EACH!

You can demonstrate Presto in a few minutes, and every sale will net you $1 or more. We give you free re-fills for your Demonstrator . . . free (and dramatically powerful) printed sales material to "talk from" . . . free certificates testifying that Presto is GUARANTEED FOR 20 YEARS.

YOU DON'T NEED TO INVEST A PENNY. Just collect and *keep* $1 or more every time you write an order—we collect the balance and deliver the extinguisher. (Or if you *wish*, you can buy from us at extra-low wholesale prices and then make up to $2.18 profit per unit supplying both dealers and retail customers—we'll send you free details.)

WILLIAM F. WYDALLIS

"Most specialty salesmen are always on the lookout for a 'natural.' The 'natural' of this decade is the PRESTO FIRE EXTINGUISHER . . . because it is handy in size, simple to operate, and in the right price range.

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—William F. Wydallis
Van Wert, Ohio

CHARLES KAMA

This Presto salesman from Texas was featured as "Salesman of the Month" on the front cover of a sales magazine. He told the magazine's reporter:

"I think I've succeeded pretty well. I'm making more than a thousand dollars a month—and I haven't touched bottom yet."

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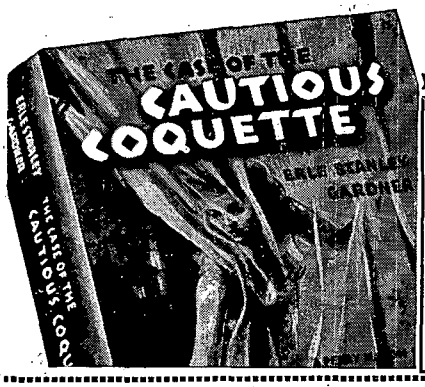

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